

# Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May – Morning Worship for Easter 6



Led by Sue Nelms, LLM

<https://zoom.us/j/82311473640>

## Opening Words

Welcome in the name of Christ.

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you  
**and also with you.**

## Gathering Prayer

O Lord, open our lips

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

O God, make speed to save us.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

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.**

Praise the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**

cf Psalm 51.15; 70.1

## Hymn – Blest are the pure in heart

- 1 Blest are the pure in heart,  
for they shall see our God;  
the secret of the Lord is theirs,  
their soul is Christ's abode.
  
- 2 The Lord who left the heavens  
our life and peace to bring,  
to dwell in lowliness with men,  
their pattern and their king.

3 Still to the lowly soul  
he doth himself impart  
and for his dwelling and his throne  
chooseth the pure in heart.

4 Lord, we thy presence seek;  
may ours this blessing be:  
give us a pure and lowly heart,  
a temple meet for thee.

vv 1 and 3 John Keble (1792-1866)  
and vv 2 and 4 William John Hall (1793-1861) (Public Domain)

### Saying Sorry

In baptism we died with Christ,  
so that as Christ was raised from the dead,  
we might walk in newness of life.  
Let us receive new life in him  
as we confess our sins in penitence and faith.

cf Romans 6.4

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 us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,  
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Anthem Surrexit Christus**

Surrexit Christus alleluia!  
Cantate Domino, alleluia!

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.  
For his love has no end.

The Lord is my strength, the Lord is my song,  
he has been my saviour.

I shall not die, I shall live.  
I shall live and recount God's deeds.

Surrexit Christus alleluia!  
Cantate Domino, alleluia!

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### **Readings by Rick Nelms**

#### **Acts 17:22-31**

<sup>22</sup> Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup> For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup> From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup> so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him - though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

<sup>28</sup> For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we too are his offspring.”

<sup>29</sup> Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup> While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.’

**For the Word of the Lord.**

**Thanks be to God.**

## **John 14:15-21**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>15</sup> ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. <sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup> ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.’

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## **Reflection by Rev Barnabas Leeke**

There are two points that I’d like to try and draw out of our readings today, hopefully they will chime with what you have taken from these passages. However, the beauty of scripture is that there is so much meaning to be drawn from it, and it is so endlessly rich, that it may have spoken to you in a completely different way, which is OK too, but

I offer you this. In Paul's speech to the Athenians and in John's farewell discourse (as Jesus speaks to his disciples for a final time), I think we see something of the unique nature of Christian community (at its best) and a call to expand our expectation, perception or belief in where we might see God at work.

Some of you will know already that I am a beekeeper, I have a few hives in my back garden and try my best to look after the bees in a way which is good for them, the environment and my neighbours! Once you get into beekeeping you discover a great deal about bees that most people will never even think about. You also discover that honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) are not like other bees at all, when we hear about the decline of bees it is not managed honey bee colonies that are being talked about but rather any of the 20,000 or so bee species in the world or the 250 species that live in the UK and which are threatened by habitat loss, pesticide use and, quite probably, the effect of managed honey bee colonies. There are some features of honey bees which are very interesting though, and two in particular which illustrate the points I've drawn from the readings.

The first of these is that honey bees live in unique communities. There is no other bee, and very few other insects which overwinter in the way that honey bees do. The problem of winter in temperate climates is a tricky one for insects, which, like all living things, need to keep warm in order to survive. Insects have evolved different strategies to overwinter successfully. Many overwinter as pupae or larvae, an intermediate stage in their life cycle which is better able to cope with low temperatures. In most social insects the queen is the only individual to survive the winter, usually buried, hiding under tree bark or, in modern times, exploiting the warmth of attics and wall spaces. Ants and termites keep the whole colony in a sort of suspended animation, deep underground, until the weather warms up again. Only honey bees have developed a strategy similar to many higher mammals, to collect enough food during the summer months and to use this to power a type of communal shivering activity that can keep them (and most importantly the queen) sufficiently warm to survive.

As Paul looks around Athens he sees something similar (indulge me!). The Athenians have a staggering array of ways of dealing with the complexities of living in the world as sentient, moral beings. Not only do they have a wide range of gods to cover every possible aspect of their lives, including hedging their bets with an 'unknown god', they also have a diversity of moral philosophies which they can subscribe to and then live their lives accordingly. Paul is arguing with both epicureans (who believe that one should extract the maximum amount of pleasure from life and avoid pain) and stoics (who believe that our lives are ruled by fate and that we have much to learn from even negative experiences), almost polar opposites. His argument is essentially that they are all ignorant of the truth, that there is a better and more righteous way – to repent and turn to Christ as the image and very person of God, guiding us into a relationship which will nurture and sustain us through the 'winters' of life in a way that no other strategy can.

I think we see the same attitude in our world today. There are so many ways to find community, so many different moral or religious frameworks, and Christianity can appear to be just another option on the table. But I think that, like the honey bee, we have something which is unique, which has all the trappings of many other community organisations (increasingly so as we comply with more and more regulation), but also has something which is inexplicable and wonderful. In trying (and not always succeeding!) to imitate Jesus, we aim to build a community with love, forgiveness and understanding at its heart. But there is even more to it than that, something happens when we come together to seek God in community which is unlike anything else. I believe that is God's Holy Spirit at work in and through us. Perhaps this is why the psalmist describes it as 'sweeter than honey dripping from the honeycomb'! (Ps 19.10)

If that is so, why do people seem to find it so hard to join it?! This is where another feature of bees, and Pauline theology, comes in. There is a saying in beekeeping that you can move a beehive either three feet, or three miles, but nothing in-between! This is because bees have an

incredibly accurate sense of direction and very strong location imprinting. A newly hatched bee, on its maiden flight, will circle the hive a few times, even trying to go in and out to check they have the right entrance hole. This imprints an image of the hive's surroundings and a precise location into its mind (based on the sun and possibly also magnetic fields) and it will automatically and unfailingly return to that small hole over and over again for the rest of its life. They then never check the location when they leave, if you move the hive the bees will return to the exact spot, searching within a short radius to try and find their colony. The only reason they would recheck the location as they leave would be if the move had been so significant as to radically change the appearance (of the sun's position); hence three feet or three miles.

I think the Athenians, and many in our world today, are similarly imprinted with ways of being, believing and behaving. Like the bee searching for a relocated hive, they keep coming back to the same sort of spot, unable to make the break required to find God waiting for them just a few feet away. Paul describes them as 'groping' for God, the image of someone staggering around a dark room looking for the light switch is an apt one. They are so close to faith, but find it hard to grasp. Paul experiences this when he finishes his speech with his declaration of the resurrection of Jesus. Many just cannot bring themselves to believe it, because it goes against their worldview, but a few manage to make the leap and come to faith from his witness. These ideas are important when we think about mission, sharing the good news of our faith with others that we know or meet. Firstly, we should be confident that there is something unique about the Christian faith, and that it is relevant to people's lives and experience. There is a way of living, taught by Jesus, which is 'as sweet as honey', a way to be in relationship with God and each other which is life-giving and life-affirming. Secondly, we need to move people three feet at a time (or perhaps three miles!). For many that we meet the leap of faith required is too great, they need to experience the Christian life in small encouraging steps – through friendship, community events, hospitality, prayer. For some there will be a life-changing, three mile, conversion

moment, but for most it is more of a steady journey to faith which needs kind support. That journey doesn't end, we are a pilgrim community which needs to support each other through all the different stages and landscapes. You might need some extra help for the next three feet of your faith journey, or the person next to you might need your help for theirs. Opening our minds to expand our own perception of where God might be working is a challenge to us today too, as much as it was to the Athenians.

This was Jesus' exhortation as he formed the first community of followers in his disciples and gave them the pattern we have a little of in our gospel reading today. He promised not to leave them 'orphaned', alone, without help; the Holy Spirit dwells with us and helps us to keep the commandments that create a loving and forgiving community. We need to be constantly on the lookout for where that Holy Spirit might be leading us next, because this is where the metaphor runs out. We are not bees, we are children of God, and as Jesus said, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Let's pray.

Lord, help each of us to do our bit to build a loving and forgiving Christian community. Expand our perception of where you might be already at work and encourage us to share our faith to build and grow your kingdom in the places where you have located us. Amen.

### **Affirmation of 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.**

cf I Corinthians 15.3-7

### **Prayers of Intercession prepared by John Crang**

In the power of the spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the father.

Loving God, We thank you for showing us through Jesus what it means to love one another in humility.

Loving Lord, we pray for those whom others have failed to love; for those who have been damaged by too little human love; for those who have been rejected by family and friends; for those who suffer because of the hatred one group of people has for another; for all who are alone and without people to love them.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for our own church, for wisdom, strength, and inspiration for those involved in leadership and in all the activities of your church in this place. Inspire and guide us all how best to show your love in our community and to one another. We pray for the wider church, for areas of disagreement and conflict. Help a way to be found through and may the loudest voice be the call to love one another.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Loving God, we lift to you those affected by ongoing unease, destruction, and war across the globe. We remember before you those places and situations that we have noticed in the news, those things that make us angry and events and peoples that we have ignored. We lift to you those across the world who have the power to make a difference and ask for your love, prompting, discernment and guidance. We pray for those involved in fragile diplomacy and pray for wisdom and decision making that will help support the most vulnerable in your world.

In our country, we pray for our health service, our education system, our justice system and our defence services. Give wisdom to the

decision makers, help them to find possibilities in situations which feel impossible.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Loving God, we pray for all those who are in need at this time, those who struggle with their health, in body or mind, and those who support and care for them.

We remember those who have died and those who mourn them. In a moment of silence may we bring before you those on our hearts. May they know your love and comfort and your presence close beside them at this time. Guide us that we may know how best to care and love them.

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

### **Collect**

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 forever. **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 forever. Amen.**

### **Hymn – Christ is the one who calls**

- 1 Christ is the one who calls,  
the one who loved and came,  
to whom by right it falls  
to bear the highest Name:  
and still today  
our hearts are stirred  
to hear his word  
and walk his way.
- 2 Christ is the one who seeks,  
to whom our souls are known.  
The word of love he speaks  
can wake a heart of stone;  
for at that sound  
the blind can see,  
the slave is free,  
the lost are found.
- 3 Christ is the one who died,  
forsaken and betrayed;  
who, mocked and crucified,  
the price of pardon paid.  
Our dying Lord,  
what grief and loss,  
what bitter cross,  
our souls restored!
- 4 Christ is the one who rose  
in glory from the grave,

to share his life with those  
whom once he died to save.  
He drew death's sting  
and broke its chains,  
who lives and reigns,  
our risen King.

5 Christ is the one who sends,  
his story to declare;  
who calls his servants friends  
and gives them news to share.  
His truth proclaim  
in all the earth,  
his matchless worth  
and saving Name.

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## Notices

### Blessing

In darkness and in light,  
in trouble and in joy,  
help us, heavenly Father,  
to trust your love,  
to serve your purpose,  
and to praise your name;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
and the blessing of God almighty  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always.  
**Amen.**

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