

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 8th May 2022

Worship for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Hello. I hope all is well. Next week, we will have our May Church Parade and we look forward to welcoming the Scouts and Guides to our service. With next Sunday being the start of Christian Aid Week, the service will include details of this year's appeal and prayers for the work of the charity. For today, our readings are Psalm 23 and John 10:22-30 which speak of the Lord being like a loving shepherd and Acts 9:36-43 which tells the story of Peter raising Tabitha back to life. Let us worship God together:

A gathering prayer

God, our shepherd,
you gather us into your kingdom,
and into your loving arms.
You seek us out when we are lost.
You rescue us when we are in trouble.
You welcome us when we return home.
Make us – your church, your people –
into a sanctuary for all who are fearful,
a place of healing for those who are broken,
and a welcoming home for all who seek it. **Amen.**

A prayer of approach

Jesus, loving shepherd, be near to us.
Jesus, good shepherd, watch over us.
Jesus, caring shepherd, be gentle with us.
Jesus, consoling shepherd, walk with us.
Jesus, commissioning shepherd, send us out:
to be near others;
to watch over others;
to be gentle with others –
and to walk with them in your name. **Amen.**

BPW 251 I know that my Redeemer lives!

1 I know that my Redeemer lives!
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head!

2 He lives, to bless me with his love;
He lives, to plead for me above;
He lives, my hungry soul to feed;
He lives, to help in time of need.

3 He lives, and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives, to lead me safely there.

4 He lives, all glory to his name;
He lives, my Saviour, still the same;
What joy the blest assurance gives!
I know that my Redeemer lives!
Samuel Medley (1738-99)

Our children go to Junior Church with our love and blessing

A prayer of adoration

Awesome God, full of glory,
you fill our hearts with your love.
Awesome God, full of blessings,
you fill our lives with your wisdom.
Awesome God, full of riches,
you enrich us with power and strength
for all the ups and downs of life.
Awesome God, full of grace,
we worship you and glorify your mighty name. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Forgive us, Lord, when we turn away from those
whose tears we are afraid of;
whose grief we have not wanted to share;
whose pain we have not wanted to see.
Forgive us, and grant us courage
to be silent where there are no words;
to be supportive when there is no easy way ahead;
and to carry always the hope of Christ in our hearts –
wherever our journey takes us. **Amen.**

An assurance of forgiveness

The Lord is our shepherd, who restores our soul.
He washes us clean and anoints us with the oil of forgiveness.
Thank you, Lord. **Amen.**

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We praise you, Lord Jesus,
for calling us to be your people.
As we gather today, may we
listen to your word and reflect;
listen to one another and respond;
listen to the cries of the world and react –
that no one may cry alone, and all may rejoice in your love. **Amen.**

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.
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.

R&S 552 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.

H. W. Baker (1821-77)

Old Testament Reading

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Gospel Reading

John 10:22-30

Jesus Is Rejected by the Jews

²²At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah,^[a] tell us plainly.’²⁵ Jesus answered, ‘I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me;²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.^[b] ³⁰The Father and I are one.’

New Testament Reading

Acts 9:36-43

Peter in Lydda and Joppa

³⁶Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, ‘Please come to us without delay.’³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Reflection

Today, we reflect on Luke's wonderful story in Acts. He has just told his readers about Saul's conversion and now, he leads us back into the Jerusalem Church which is where Peter is the prominent person. Before Luke writes of the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, he firstly seeks to show that Peter is another strong witness to the power God unleashed in the world through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. To achieve this, he tells two miracle stories, the one we've just heard about Tabitha, and just before it, the healing of Aeneas, a paralytic man. Luke hope that his readers will hear the clear echoes of the healing miracle stories of Jesus that he shared in his Gospel writing: Jesus healing a paralytic (Luke 5:17-26), Jesus raising a widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and Jesus raising Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56). He trusts these will easily be called to mind here. In this way, he shows that Jesus' prophetic ministry did not end when he died, that this ministry now continues through the service of Peter, John and others. In fact, he actually draws us further back too, to the Hebrew Scriptures: the stories make so much sense when similar stories, such as Elijah raising the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha's raising of the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4:8-37) are called to mind. Here is Peter cast firmly in the Old Testament prophet mould and as standing in a long tradition of prophetic ministry.

This helps us to understand both the context and intent of Luke's story and highlights how the power of God was still at work in the new community of Jesus followers. In fact, the dramatic effect of these miracles performed by Peter upon the church and surrounding community are carefully explained as we read that 'And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord' (Acts 9:35) and 'this became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord' (9:42). Many come to faith! Of course, this story of the raising of Tabitha is powerful in so many ways. Luke's portrays Tabitha as a model disciple of Jesus. She is a follower of Jesus in a fledgling community at the port of Joppa, which clearly includes men and women. In fact, Luke uses an unusual term, *mathetria*, for a woman disciple. Outside of the Church, women would not often be characterised as students in that time. She is 'devoted to good works and acts of charity', she is devoted to serving others and has developed a charitable ministry among the women of the town, especially, among the widows, at a time when there'd be no financial support for them.

Tabitha's care and creativity leads her to making tunics and other clothes for the widows who were in need. When Peter is on the scene, they're found wearing the tunics with thankful hearts and as a touching tribute to the life and love of dear Tabitha. She had lovingly shared her gifts, kindness, generosity with those around her, it had transformed their lives and now they feel the pain of her loss. She had made such a difference and they lament her loss and face up to the possibility that the good work she began might not continue. For me, what makes this story so powerful is that here, in Tabitha, we see a real-life example of someone whose life beautifully bears witness to the power of the Christian faith.

Of course, she's not alone though, is she? This is seen through Peter as well. Through his prophetic ministry of word and deed, his healing of the paralytic man and then his raising of Tabitha, we see the continuing effects of the risen Lord. By the time Peter arrives in Joppa, Tabitha lies ready to be buried. As we mentioned earlier, there are echoes of earlier stories in this story. His action to remove from the upper room the many mourners, reminds us of Jesus in the house of Jairus (Luke 8), although with Tabitha, the mourners are almost definitely genuine and are not professional. Peter repeats Jesus' 'get up', adding only the name of the deceased. But where Jesus tries to limit publicity, Peter encourages the good news to spread. After Tabitha amazingly arose, Peter called 'the saints and widows [and] he showed her to be alive' this became known in Joppa and many believed in the Lord' (Acts 9:41-42). If we recall last week's reading from John for a second, here, we also find Peter following the instructions of Jesus after their breakfast on the beach: 'Feed my lambs', 'tend my sheep' 'feed my sheep'. Today, we see he is now serving as a super shepherd faithfully feeding Jesus' flock by healing, consoling and guiding. Peter's service as shepherd reminds us of Jesus, and even of Elijah and Elisha as we hear that he raises Tabitha who will now carry on creating the clothing for those in crisis, and in doing so, he encourages us, as a great example, just as Tabitha does, to live a life of loving service.

Did you notice Peter's timely response to a request for help? He got up and immediately went to help. Did you notice Peter's compassion and practical care throughout as he serves those surrounded by death and

grief? He prayed, he offered Tabitha his hand and helped her up and he immediately calls those who love her most to greet the now raised Tabitha. Did you notice that in truth, this is a story about service? Tabitha does practical good works, Peter prays and heals and still there's more to be said, more examples to express. Did you notice that the widows have cared for Tabitha after her death, that the two problem solving messengers rush to get Peter's help and that Simon the Tanner offers hospitality to Peter and his entourage and they enter his home after he has aided Tabitha.

Friends, I hope that we are feeling inspired today. I hope that we're happy and committed to keeping up our encouragement of one another and to fostering all of the available giftings within our church family as we worship, witness and work together, as we welcome and celebrate, not only one another, but all, whether friends or strangers, without any prejudice of any possible kind, as we participate in a servant hearted, prophetic, life giving Easter shaped faith, so clearly in view in today's story. We are reminded today that those on the outside can discern the presence of the risen Lord through acts of kindness and compassion as well as through acts of speech, perhaps even more so. Perhaps, as we thank God for the many opportunities that we already have, as individuals and a church, to show care and compassion to those in need, we also remain open to new possibilities for loving service to those in need. Where is God now calling us to go and show care and compassion, help and healing, such that, just as in Luke's story 'many' might 'come to believe in the Lord'? Amen.

A moment for reflection

R&S 636 The Church of Christ, in every age

1 The Church of Christ, in every age
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.

2 Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live until they die.

3 Then let the Servant Church arise,
a caring Church, that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.

4 For he alone, whose blood was shed,
can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.

5 We have no mission but to serve,
in full obedience to our Lord;
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating Word.

F. Pratt Green (1903-2000)
© Oxford University Press from *Planting Seeds and Growing Trees*

Our prayers of intercession

God of all nations, in faith and with trusting perseverance, we pray for those suffering as a consequence of the policies and decisions of their leaders; for those living in war zones; for those fleeing their countries; for those battling with the effects of climate change; for those left with less than they need to survive; for those whose daily lives are controlled by others.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who work in caring professions; those suffering from exhaustion; for those feeling demoralised; for those they aim to support and minister to; for those waiting for help and treatment; for those in the last stages of their life.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for the church throughout the world; for leaders who have lost their way; for those ministering in divided communities; for those in places where the church is marginalised, persecuted or simple deemed irrelevant.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for the young people of our world; for children traumatised by war and violence; for those whose abuse goes unreported; for those sitting exams; for those struggling to find their way in the world.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

And we pray for one another; and entrust to you those things that worry us; those situations we feel helpless in; those decisions that burden us; those losses that overwhelm us.

Loving God, we pray especially for those who have lost loved ones recently. We pray for Moira, her sister Esther and all the family following the sad loss of her dear Mum, Mona. We think also of those who are facing challenges with their health. We think especially of Pat Smith who has now returned home. We pray for all those among us who are receiving treatment and medical help at the moment. We pray also for all our dear church friends in residential care and all those unable to join us here at this time.

We bring other friends and loved ones before God in a moment of quiet.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer. Amen.

R&S 740 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known His might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name—the Lord, the mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and forever more!

Timothy Dudley-Smith. (1926-) based on Luke 1:46-55
Copyright © 1961 Timothy Dudley-Smith.

A sending out prayer

God of the miraculous and the mundane,
open our eyes to see the goodness in others and ourselves.
Give us the willingness to be available
to the community in which we live,
that quietly and confidently we might live as those
who know they are part of the Easter story
that does not end in Jerusalem,
but goes out into all the world.
We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Blessing

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be upon us and those we love, this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.**