

St Peter's Wolvercote & All Saints Wytham Seventh Sunday of Easter 24 May 2020

Dear Friends

Welcome to our Communion service for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, the Sunday that bridges the gap between Ascension Day last Thursday and Pentecost next week. We are in the middle of the nine days of prayer which run from Ascension to Pentecost, during which we are encouraged to pray with the Lord's Prayer "Thy Kingdom come". I do commend our sermon for this Sunday from Viv Bridges - a very personal reflection which I am sure we will all relate to.

As we remember the disciples meeting together for prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem, it felt appropriate to record our service in the chancel at St Peter's, a place we often meet for prayer. It actually felt very moving, celebrating Communion in St Peter's for the first time since before Holy Week. We will be back in St Peter's again to record our service for Trinity Sunday on 7 June. We look forward also to celebrating and recording Communion in All Saints' Wytham church sometime in June, before we return to St Peter's again to celebrate Petertide on 28 June.

I hope the sense of beginning the long journey back will lift your spirits as it is mine.

With love and prayers
Charles

Holy Communion in the Easter Season

The Lord be with you

All and also with you

Alleluia. Christ is risen!

All He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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.

All 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.

All Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us.

All 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.

All Amen.

The Collect
Let us pray

O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Readings

Acts 1.6-14

⁶When the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of

James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

For the gift of the Word **Thanks be to God.**

1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. ⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

For the gift of the Word **Thanks be to God.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John 17.1-11

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹Jesus looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. ⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon prepared by Revd Viv Bridges

The time between Christ's Ascension into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit was very strange for the disciples. I wonder if Peter called to mind those days when he wrote the words of our Epistle today – words that are so appropriate to our own 'strange time'. Peter wrote:

*¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. ⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷**Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.** ⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰**And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.***

These are words that we all need to hear at the moment (and when I started this sermon I didn't realise how significant 'keep alert' would be). But I suspect that, however deep our faith, there will have been, or there still are, moments when we can't help questioning if God really does 'care for us'.

We wonder why there is so much suffering of so many different kinds: the loss of employment, the possible loss of the futures we had hoped for our children or our friends, the pain of losing loved ones, the pain of being cut off from the people we love and long to embrace once again. Of course, some good things have come out of the difficulties – the

realisation of how much community spirit there is, of how much people care for each other, the reduction of traffic of all sorts and therefore in emission of greenhouse gases.

Hopefully many of these positive things will last after the crisis and in the light of this we can be tempted to feel that, as faithful Christians, continuing to be sad and anxious about the painful things is somehow a sign of a lack of faith. But this is not so. We are human beings with all the emotions and vulnerability this entails, so it's in our nature to worry and be sad. Christ understood all this – surely one of the reasons why God became incarnate was so that he should know what it is like to be human – to be afraid, to be anxious, to weep, to be angry!

So pain and anxiety are natural reactions to our present crisis. But other things may have helped us. Knowing that we are all suffering in some way or another can be a comfort (in his letter Peter refers to this sort of situation, verse 9). And self-isolation has offered some unexpected opportunities. I suspect that our gardens are tidier than for many years (and what a glorious spring it is, thanks be to God). Many of us will have discovered beautiful walks close to our homes, and we have all discovered how extremely generous our neighbours are.

And what about all that extra time? For many of us who are normally busy, spare time used to be the one thing we longed for. But for me so much spare time has been one of the hardest things to cope with. There is a limit to how much tidying, sorting, cleaning around the house and gardening there is. Those puzzles that were once rather a treat to attempt during moments of leisure are now losing their attraction.

One thing that was unexpected and initially quite unsettling is the fact that with all this spare time I have found it very difficult to catch up on some of the contemplative time with God that always seems so elusive. Some of you know that I try to get away 3 or 4 times a year to be alone, usually in self-catering accommodation near to hills or the sea where I love walking. During that time, it's a joy to simply 'be' – free of distractions and aware in a very special way of God's presence. But now, with all this time, I've found it very hard to 'be still'. Instead of starting the day with Morning Prayer (well, after a cup of tea!) I've first tuned in to Sainsbury's online to check if there's a slot for a home delivery! My mind has been distracted with what to write to the grandchildren, when will I be able to hug the children and grandchildren, what shall we do as a 'quiz' when we get together online through Zoom. To make the time go a bit more quickly, I've tried to lose myself in puzzles, or in a jigsaw, or the garden. I realise that I desperately want to try to keep some control by trying to plan the days.

So, somehow, in spite of all this space, concentrating on God has been hard. And yet I have constantly felt held. Not held by the people I love in that longed-for hug, but held somewhere deep down. I am absolutely certain of God's presence amid all the distraction, frustration, loss of control, pain. And this reminds me of something amazing. It reminds me that God loves me and supports me all the time if I let him. His love and his presence do not depend on how many prayers I say, or how much time I spend reading holy books. It is unconditional. So, when the things we tend to rely on to enable us to feel God's presence are taken away, we can trust he is still there. Of course, times of prayer (however we do it) are important in building our relationship with God, but if for some reason we can't go to church or can't receive communion, or we can't say the prayers we are used to saying, we needn't be afraid even though we may feel stripped and lost.

St John of the Cross has much to say about this. He is much misunderstood. He was a compassionate and sympathetic spiritual director, and he didn't say that everyone must have some time of dark night in order to come close to God. But he did understand, like St Paul and St Peter, that times of darkness can be used by God in a special way and bring about an unexpected deepening of our relationship with him. John was aware, as are so many of our best loved spiritual writers, that we can sometimes get bound up in our own efforts at praying. As if God will only love us if we pray enough or go to church enough. Our attention can become so fixed on techniques that our focus is turned away from God. But during times of stripping, when techniques fail us, God works in us in a special way because we are no longer trying to control him. We discover the reality of God – that he works without our help. We eventually find we have been brought to a new relationship with the God who longs to enter our lives to show us that he really does care about us.

The disciples went through two dark times when they felt their Lord had left them. After the Crucifixion they felt their world had come to an end, they were terrified. But after only three days Jesus reappeared in a different form. Forty days later the disciples saw this new Jesus leave them again – into heaven. This time they weren't so afraid even though Christ had left them. They waited and eventually they came to know him in yet another way, in the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

John of the Cross spent many years confined in a cell that he could hardly stand up in. He knew about isolation, pain and suffering, but learnt that times of darkness can be transformational as we learn to trust more and more in God, rather than our own efforts. I hope that I am not the only person who has discovered this to be true as I've found the things I usually depend on slip out of my control. I look forward to getting back to the normality of going to Church,

being able to be still and quiet, but I know that if we can surrender to our helplessness and fear we can find God is there, just waiting for us to notice.

'Cast all your anxiety on God, because he cares about you. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.'

Amen

The Intercessions - prepared this week by Diana Clews

Almighty God, may our prayers rise to you just as your Son Jesus Christ was taken up to you in Heaven. May the Ascension of our Lord give us feelings of joy and hope, as we await the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Everlasting God, we pray for the worldwide church, remembering especially the 260 million persecuted Christians who are always on the fringes of society and who will suffer even more as a result of the pandemic. May they receive practical help from charities such as Open Doors and the support from the prayers of their fellow Christians.

We pray for all church leaders - for Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, Steven, Bishop of Oxford, and for Father Peter, who leads his Coptic congregation in worship at St Peter's Church when it is open.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Creator God, we give thanks for the beautiful world in which we live, and which we have recently had more time to enjoy. We pray that people everywhere will be good stewards of your creation, caring for their fellow creatures and not polluting or destroying the seas and forests.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Omnipotent God, we pray for the leaders of all countries, that they will make wise and just decisions for the benefit of all their people. We pray for peace in areas of conflict, for freedom in areas of oppression and for the innocent victims of violence, repression, disease or natural disasters. We pray for all refugees, asylum seekers, and all who are imprisoned unjustly.

We remember especially the people of Africa and the Middle East who are facing devastation, not only from COVID-19 but also from a plague of locusts of Biblical proportions.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our own country, for the Queen, the Prime Minister, and Members of Parliament; for doctors, nurses, carers, teachers, shop workers, delivery drivers, postmen and all others who are working hard and at risk to themselves to keep the country safe and well.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for our local community and for all who have helped their friends and neighbours over the past two months. We pray for our local M.P. and councillors, for members of St Peter's P.C.C. and other church committees, St Peter's Net, sidespeople, those on church rotas and the Partnership office. We pray for people who live in Elmthorpe Road, Fairlawn End, Fairlawn Flats, Mere Road, Queen's Gate, Rosamund Road and St. Peter's Road.

We pray for all who are in need- the lonely, the depressed, the bereaved. We remember and pray for those who are on the fringe of our society; for the homeless who have been placed in B&B rooms, for the vulnerably housed who are receiving food deliveries, for the Big Issue sellers who have not been able to sell on the streets since lockdown began, for the many additional people who are now dependent on food banks, and for those who have lost their jobs due to the effects of the corona virus. We give thanks and pray for the organisations which are trying to help them- the Community Emergency Foodbank, The Gatehouse, NOAAH, and the Oxford Foodbank.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we pray for all who are sick with the corona virus or other diseases and we remember especially those who have asked for our prayers- Charmaine Anderson, Marion Boulton, Trixie Collier, Lyn Dean, Margaret Ewert, Jenny Gerrard, Gordon Killie and his wife Jane and children Charlie and Isabella, Vikki Shepstone, Jean Tuffley, Ray Voss, John Waugh and Margaret Williams. We pray for Valerie Barnish, Tom Ekin and James who are cared for away from home.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful God, we give thanks for all those who have gone before us, especially remembering members of our family and friends; for John and Charles Wesley, evangelists and hymn writers; the Venerable Bede, scholar and writer; Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury; and Josephine Butler, social reformer.

We remember Leonard Trafford and others who have died recently, and all those who have died from COVID-19, and we pray for their families and friends.

Among those who died at this time in earlier years we remember Vivien Castle, Richard Kindersley and Sybil Stockford.

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

Post Communion Prayer

Let us pray
God our Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.
Amen.

The Blessing

God the Father,
by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,
strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life;
And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Thy Kingdom Come

Thy Kingdom Come - the global prayer movement inviting Christians around the world to pray for nine days - started on Ascension Day and will continue through the coming week until Pentecost.

The aims are: to join in prayer with the whole family of God the Father; to pray for the empowering of God the Holy Spirit; and that we may be effective witnesses to God the Son, Jesus Christ. You are encouraged to say the Lord's Prayer - the one thing that unites all Christians - every day in your own way. For inspiration, go to the dedicated website (<https://www.thykingdomcome.global>) where you will find a fantastic range of resources for children, young people, adults and families, schools, churches and small groups.

Last week, Shei suggested *Stilling, Prayer and Visualisation* - a gentle, ancient prayer practice. There is still time to try it out.

Stilling

Find somewhere comfortable to sit, ideally with your feet flat on the floor and uncrossed legs. Rest your relaxed hands on your thighs with palms facing upwards. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Be aware of when you breathe in and when you breathe out.

Prayer

When you become aware of the rhythm of your breath add the Jesus Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ Son of God (on the in breath)

Have mercy on me a sinner (on the out breath)

Repeat for as long as feels comfortable.

Visualisation

You might then like to keep the rhythm of breathing the prayer and add in visualisation of yourself walking in a beautiful place or watching the waves break upon the shore...all in your mind's eye!

The Upper Room

Several Oxford churches are seeking to unite the Christian community in our city through a city-wide prayer initiative. As part of 'Thy Kingdom Come', every Christian is invited to pray in a virtual prayer room open day and night from 21st to 31st May. The name is inspired by that place of meeting with Christ referenced in the Last Supper and by the place where the disciples gathered, joining constantly in prayer, before the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:13). The initiative also builds on the Oxford Prayer (<https://youtu.be/dgDGauh93Ik>) recently produced by Mat Watt at Tyndale School.

The organisers would love to see people taking part from every denomination and background in the Christian church in Oxford. Details, and the link to sign up to an hour of prayer slot, are available at <https://www.upperroomoxford.org>.

Church at Home: watch online or dial in

The Diocese of Oxford's Church at Home 10am service for the Seventh Sunday of Easter takes place online at <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/> at 10am on Sunday. Those unable to watch online



may call 01865 920930 to participate by telephone. Standard call rates apply. The order of service is available on the same webpage.

This service comes between our celebration of the Lord ascending to his Father in heaven and the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Venerable Stephen Pullin presides and Canon Peter Groves, Vicar of St Mary Magdalen, gives us his reflection on the Gospel reading according to John.

All Saints' Wytham revealed

The work on All Saints' tower is complete at last and the churchyard is open once again! Now that the scaffolders have returned from furlough, the scaffolding is down and the lovely new clock face is fully revealed. Not only that but the scaffolding alarm, which the nesting jackdaws repeatedly set off, has been removed.

The seat to the left of the gate affords a generous view of the tower and clock although the new crocuses are long since over – at least until next year. But if you would like a destination for your daily walk, why not come to All Saints', rest awhile and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the church and its surroundings. You would be very welcome. The bench is just about long enough for social distancing! David Humphrey

FairTrade

A reminder from Lorna Logan – while St Peter's remains closed, you can still buy your favourite Fair Trade products online at <https://www.traidcraftshop.co.uk/>.

Because the Lord sustains me

We are undoubtedly living through one of the greatest crises of our lives. Reflections for a Church in Lockdown is a series of reflective podcasts and online audio by the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft. The series aims to resource the Church during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Episode 3 of this series explores Psalm 3; a psalm from the middle of a crisis. What can we learn from the psalmist in the current crisis and when we are feeling overwhelmed?

Listen here: (<https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/podcast/because-the-lord-sustains-me>)

Oxford COVID-19 vaccine programme seeking more volunteers

The Oxford Vaccine Group is arguably one of the world's leading laboratories developing a vaccine against COVID-19. Around 1000 healthy volunteers under 55 years old have been vaccinated in the last month.

Researchers are now looking for more volunteers to extend testing to adults over 55 and children between 5 and 12 years. To read more about what taking part in this study might entail, go to the University of Oxford website (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-05-22-oxford-covid-19-vaccine-begin-phase-iii-human-trials>).

Flying Goose June 2020

Although the government is encouraging a considered, careful, and gradual easing of restrictions, we have to stay alert to possible new waves of COVID-19 infection. Many of our Flying Goose volunteers are understandably wary of house-to-house distribution at the moment. Therefore, the Flying Goose team decided that the next issue, due 1 June, will only be available electronically except for a small number of the congregation who do not have access to the internet. A link to the file will be published in the 3 June e-newsletter, on our website and on the Wolvercote & Wytham Facebook page. Send enquiries to flying.goose.ed@gmail.com

Contributions please

Thank you for your photographs, music suggestions, poems and anecdotes received over the last weeks. These help us keep in touch with one another and what's going on around us, and are always hugely appreciated. Although restrictions are starting to ease for some, many of our friends will have to continue shielding for quite a few more weeks, most likely months. So please send us more contributions! The next e-newsletter will be distributed this Wednesday 27 May. Please send contributions to: info@stpeterswolvercote.org. Thank you!