

Worship for 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

All are welcome as we join together in worship this morning and listen to and reflect on God's message in words and music.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Let us bring ourselves to God,
Let us prepare to share in worship,
Giving thanks for all that God shares with us
Let us open our hearts and minds
To know more of God's unconditional love and care,
And be ready to share it with others
Amen.

Hymn: StF 161 – Speak, O Lord as we come to you

- 1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us; shape and fashion us in your likeness, that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith. Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us all your purposes, for your glory.**
- 2. Teach us, Lord, full obedience, holy reverence, true humility. Test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of your purity. Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see your majestic love and authority. Words of power that can never fail; let their truth prevail over unbelief.**
- 3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds; help us grasp the heights of your plans for**

us.

Truths unchanged from the dawn of time that will echo down through eternity. And by grace we'll stand on your promises, and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us. Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963)

Prayer of adoration

Lord of all life,
Beginning and end,
Provider of food and drink,
Clothing and warmth,
Love and hope,
Life in all its fullness,
we praise You.

You are the one who sustains us,
The one who nourishes us
Throughout our daily lives.
We praise You.

Prayer of confession

Lord God
You heap Your love upon us
like a parent providing
for their family's needs.
Forgive us when, like spoilt children,
we treat Your generosity as our right
or hug it possessively.
Forgive us that we have kept
what we have to ourselves
rather than offering it up to You
that You might feed and sustain others.
Forgive us that we have failed
to be concerned about the waste

that our society produces.
Forgive us when we have wanted more for ourselves
at the cost of another.

We are sorry, Lord, and in need
of Your renewing grace.

Assurance of forgiveness

God, you forgive us when we make mistakes,
When we have not shared what you have given
us
We come, knowing that we are healed and
forgiven
And given a second chance to be the people you
call us to be.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 65 – Sing of the Lord's goodness

1. **Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all
wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.**

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

2. **Power he has wielded, honour is his
garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has
broken,
new life he now gives to all.**

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

3. **Courage in our darkness, comfort in our
sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God. *Come then,
all you nations,***

*sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

4. **Praise him with your singing, praise him
with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals, praise him
with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days. *Come then,
all you nations,***

*sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

Ernest Sands (b. 1949)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 14 (NRSVA)

Denunciation of Godlessness

¹Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.

²The Lord looks down from heaven on
humankind

to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

³They have all gone astray, they are all alike
perverse;

there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

⁴Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the Lord?

⁵There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the company of the righteous.

⁶You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the Lord is their refuge.

⁷O that deliverance for Israel would come from
Zion!

When the Lord restores the fortunes of his
people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

John 6:1-15 (NRSVA)

Feeding the Five Thousand

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' ¹⁰Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so

also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Sermon

We have today one of the most evocative episodes in the gospels. Something we can all relate to. After all, everyone knows about the feeding of the 5000. It turns into a big picnic. No-one was invited but many came anyway. We're told 5000 but that's probably just the men. Add in the women and children and you can easily double that number. Compare that with the population of the nearest town, Bethsaida, probably only a few hundred, and it gives a clear sense of the looming catering problem.

Jesus turned to one of the disciples, Philip, a local of Bethsaida. How are we going to feed them? Philip cannot conceive the prospect of finding enough food. In his eyes the situation is hopeless. Maybe he has difficulty trusting Jesus. Maybe he's just overwhelmed by the numbers.

This is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels. They refer to the disciples in different ways. Matthew calls them disciples, Mark apostles and Luke 'The Twelve'. John picks out two of them, Philip and Andrew, for specific parts in his account. While Philip is close to panic, Andrew does what he can, knowing it will fall spectacularly short of what's needed. He too doesn't have a solution at his fingertips but he

offers Jesus what he's got – a boy with a few loaves and fishes - and trusts Jesus to do the rest.

The different reactions of these two disciples, Philip and Andrew, draws our attention to an essential truth in how we profess our faith. Even our own problems can sometimes seem overwhelming, let alone those of our family, friends or community. We may not feel equipped to deal with them. Society's answer is we should get better tools, bigger solutions, more powerful remedies. Jesus on the other hand simply says bring what you have, give it to me, and I'll do the rest. Trust me.

Do we though? All too often we are happy to put our trust him up to a point, but would actually prefer to rely solely on ourselves. Especially when it comes to important matters. But that's not trust at all. That's lip service.

That brings us to our second truth, and it partly depends on how you see that occasion in Galilee. You may see it as a 'direct miracle' – there really was no food at all, except the loaves and fishes, and then suddenly there was enough for the whole crowd, with plenty to spare. On the other hand perhaps you may allow the possibility that everyone had brought packed lunches, or enough people had, and were just being coy about declaring it. After all, they had walked several miles to see and hear Jesus. It would be sensible to prepare for the journey, and that would surely include bringing food for their own consumption. So, not a miracle at all, then?

On the contrary, more miraculous than the production of food is the changing of people's hearts. The presence of Jesus turned a group of self-centred people into a fellowship of sharers. Incredible! The ingredients were a boy with a meagre lunch, and Andrew who trusted Jesus

but had little idea what he was doing. When hearts are turned from cold stone to warm generosity we may rejoice. When someone who has resolutely avoided using their gifts for His kingdom suddenly volunteers to help, let us shout Alleluia! When the person who has more than enough and holds on to it tightly, offers to give some to another person less fortunate, without any strings, let us praise God.

God's kingdom is not characterised by a group of people each trying to be self-sufficient, needing less and less from others up to the point of self-isolation. It is a community of people who have different gifts and personalities, who don't all think alike, but who are quick to see and respond to the need of others, both within and outside, and who are prepared to share without a moment's notice to count the cost.

I'd like to highlight one particular example of this, one which as we come out of the pandemic will dominate our headlines more and more, will not go away when we try to ignore it, and will only get disastrously worse if we bury our heads in the sand. It sometimes feels too big for us to be able to make any difference, but can only be tackled by our taking personal and collective responsibility, turning the other cheek when inevitably there will be some who adopt a selfish approach. It is of course the looming disaster of climate change, and its twin sister, the loss of biodiversity.

We can either opt for Philip's approach, or that of Andrew. Like Philip, we may see it as a problem which can only overwhelm us, that there is nothing to be done, or that any action we take is too small to make any meaningful impact. Let's hope it will go away, all the time knowing it won't. Or like Andrew, we may do what we can, little though it may seem,

contribute what we have, do our best and offer it to Jesus.

On a local level some of our churches are using their outside spaces to encourage wildlife, grow food to share and offer a soothing environment for mental and spiritual wellbeing. Three churches in the circuit already hold EcoChurch awards and at least one more has started the journey. The circuit itself has decided to aim for EcoCircuit status, and the District is similarly seeking to become an EcoDistrict.

At the other end of the scale, on the international stage the COP26 summit in Glasgow this autumn provides an opportunity for governments around the world to take action to limit climate change. Our prayers are needed more than ever. Of course, climate change is going to affect our children and grandchildren even more. A group of young people, Young Christian Climate Network, or YCCN, is currently walking a relay from the G7 venue in Cornwall to Glasgow, arriving in time for COP26. They will pass through our circuit between 20-22nd August and we're invited to support and encourage them in a variety of ways. Google them if you want to get involved.

Surely anything which raises awareness of our impact on the planet is to be applauded. A few years ago the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby published a lent resource entitled 'Dethroning Mammon'. In it he used a phrase that has stuck with me. He says we need to learn to 'tread lightly on this planet'. At the moment we're going round with large hob-nailed boots. While we're all desperate to exit the pandemic and return to 'normal' we must not. We can no longer afford to fly everywhere as if it's our birthright. We must avoid gas-guzzling cars, gas-guzzling homes and gas-guzzling churches. It's

going to be painful and costly, but the alternative doesn't bear thinking about.

Is this so very different from the impromptu picnic held around the shore of Galilee 2000 years ago? Then, a large group of people arrived with plenty of resources. They had a choice to either use those resources for their own benefit or with a warm heart share openly so that all could flourish. The deciding factor, as always, was the presence of Jesus.

Hymn: StF 611 – Brother, sister, let me serve you

- 1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.**
- 2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.**
- 3. I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.**
- 4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.**
- 5. When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.**
- 6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.**

Richard A. M. Gillard (*b.* 1953)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

We give You thanks, Lord,
that, although like the first disciples,
we feel confused and inadequate,
You equip us with the resources to share your
abundance with all in need.
Help us to trust your promise to uphold and stay
close to us,
and grant us the courage and the confidence to
proclaim the gospel of your truth and your love
in all places and to all people.

The Lord's Prayer

And now like the first disciples we share in the
prayer which Jesus taught us

**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: StF 125 – Praise and thanksgiving

**1. Praise and thanksgiving,
Father, we offer,
for all things living
you have made good;
harvest of sown fields,
fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields,
blossom and wood.**

- 2. Lord, bless the labour
we bring to serve you,
that with our neighbour
we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling,
we would work with you;
harvesting, milling,
for daily bread.**
- 3. Father, providing
food for your children,
your wisdom guiding
teaches us share
one with another,
so that, rejoicing,
sister and brother
may know your care.**
- 4. Then will your blessing
reach every people;
each one confessing
your gracious hand.
When you are reigning
no one will hunger:
your love sustaining
fruitful the land.**

Albert Frederick Bayly (1901–1984)

The Offering & prayer

As the young boy offered all he had to Jesus
We come today with our offerings
A pocketful of faith, a bit of time,
Ourselves, our gifts, our talents.
And we know that, however small our gift or
offering,
You will do amazing things with it,
Far more than we can ever hope, believe or
imagine.
Thank you.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord God

We remember how Jesus nourished Your people
with words of justice and compassion
hear us today as we pray for our world.

We pray for those whose daily need
for food, clean water
and proper shelter goes un-met
and for those misusing what they have
in the vain pursuit of pleasure.
Feed them with a sense of justice and fairness
That they might stand firm in their right
To a decent life for all people now.

We pray for those whose lives have been broken
by violence and crime, conflict and struggle.
Feed them with courage and anticipation
of a life beyond the barriers which hold them
back.

We pray for those who are sick or sorrowing
and those who care for and console them.
We pray especially for those we know personally
who are facing difficulties at this time
and who we name in a time of silence...
Fill them, Lord, with Your healing presence
and remind them of Your promises.

We pray for those who have lost faith
in themselves and in You
and who struggle to find meaning in life.
focus their eyes on You, Lord,
and give them hope for a new day.

We pray for ourselves that we might be filled
with energy to serve You better in our daily
living.

And that we might, even in our doubt,
be reminded that You will never turn away
Or abandon us.

May we always look to You
As the one who gives us life.

All this we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 615 – Let love be real, in giving and
receiving

- 1. Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely
known.
Give me your hand, along the desert
pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go.
*As God loves us, so let us love each
other:
with no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.***
- 2. Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us
free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might
be.
Give me your strength when all my words
are weakness;
give me your love in spite of all you know.
*As God loves us, so let us love each
other:
with no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.***
- 3. Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and
disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings
show.
*As God loves us, so let us love each
other:***

***with no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.***

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

Prayer & blessing

Go now, to be nourished

in the love of God;

to be generous

in the way of Christ Jesus

and to be filled and fuelled

by the living Spirit.

And may the blessing of all three,

Creator, Saviour and Life-Force

be with us and those we love

today and always.

Amen

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StF 65 – Sing of the Lord's goodness

Ernest Sands (*b.* 1949)

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StF 125 – Praise and thanksgiving

Albert Frederick Bayly (1901–1984)

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StF 615 – Let love be real, in giving and receiving

Michael Forster (*b.* 1946)

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StF 161 – Speak, O Lord as we come to you

Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963)

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StF 611 – Brother, sister, let me serve you

Richard A. M. Gillard (*b.* 1953)

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NRSV & NRSVA

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