

Worship for 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

A warm welcome to all who are joining us in worship today.

We thank everyone who have been involved in putting this service together and for Rev Iain Ballard for the sermon.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

The Word of God is living and active.
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
We have seen his glory.

The opening song is
“As we are gathered Jesus is here, one with each other Jesus is here”
As we listen let us hold on to the fact that we are all part of God’s body the church.

Hymn: Complete Mission Praise 38 – As we are gathered

**As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
one with each other, Jesus is here;
joined by the Spirit, washed in the blood,
part of the body, the Church of God.
As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
one with each other, Jesus is here.**

(Sing twice)

John Daniels

Prayer of adoration and Confession

Loving God it is such a privilege to come to you in prayer. We are not just flinging words into space but are communicating with you. Help us to lay aside the distractions of the week and find you

today. May our ears hear your voice and our eyes see your goodness and may our tongues proclaim your name.

We see your glory in the night sky, the moon and stars shining on, century after century.
We see your glory in the land around our feet, beauty and abundance, to sustain life.
We see your glory in all people, humankind made in your image and we worship you.

Jesus Christ our Redeemer, as we worship you today our hearts are filled with praise.
You are the timeless Word of God, through whom all things were created.
You are the incarnate Word of God, demonstrating life in all its fullness.
You are the eternal Word of God, present with us now and to the end of the age.
As we worship you today our hearts are filled with awe and wonder. Amen.

Loving and gracious God, we rejoice to know your presence with us at all times and in all places.

When we feel needy, you hear us and answer us.
When we feel threatened, you hear us and answer us.
When we cry out to you, you hear us and answer us.

Loving and gracious God, you are good, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

When we have gone astray, you love us and forgive us.

When we have messed up, you love us and forgive us.

When we have followed our own desires, you love us and forgive us.

Loving and gracious God, your love for us knows no bounds, for you even came amongst us in Jesus to share our life.

We turn our hearts and minds to worship you, receive our love.

We sense your transforming power at work in our lives, receive our love.

We long to be filled with your Spirit and become more like you, receive our love.

Loving and gracious God, we worship you today.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 363 – My Jesus, My Saviour

My Jesus, my Saviour,

Lord there is none like you.

**All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of your mighty love.**

**My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,
never cease to worship you.**

*Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us
sing,
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
and the seas will roar
at the sound of your name.
I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
promise I have in you.*

Darlene Zschech (b. 1965)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 (MRSVA)

⁵The king gave orders to Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.' And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

⁶So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men.

⁸The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

⁹Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

¹⁵And ten young men, Joab's armour-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

³¹Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, 'Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.' ³²The king said to the Cushite, 'Is it well with the young man Absalom?' The Cushite answered, 'May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.'

David Mourns for Absalom

³³The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my

son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!

Psalms 130 (NRSVA)

Waiting for Divine Redemption

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 (NIVUK)

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶'In your anger do not sin': do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you

were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. ^{5:1}Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

John 6:35, 41-51 (NIVUK)

³⁵Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

⁴¹At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' ⁴²They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I came down from heaven"?''

⁴³'Stop grumbling among yourselves,' Jesus answered. ⁴⁴'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

Sermon

I wonder if you have a particular favourite meal, something that you get to choose for your birthday or for special occasions; or whether you have a particular dish that just speaks of being together as family, of bringing people together and enjoying a celebration

In this reading Jesus reminds the people of Israel of the manna sent from heaven during the Exodus. This is something that has great significance for the people as a nation and as a religious community. The manna represents God's providence, God's feeding them during the Exodus. And the Exodus itself has great cultural significance - so much that it is the greatest of their festivals, and on its first night, its history is retold. This Exodus marks a change from being a disparate group of slaves in Egypt who were brought together over a 40-year journey, into a nation – a nation which was chosen by God and belongs to God.

The Exodus is remembered by the people of Israel, both as a time of upheaval – of having to leave behind what they knew, their homes, their situations. Even though they knew that the place of Egypt wasn't good for them, it was still home - a place that they knew. The Exodus represents a time of wandering, of not having a home; nowhere to call their own; nowhere to settle down. The Exodus is a time of movement - of going from one place to another and another, relying solely on the providence of God. The people of Israel complained to God on that Exodus, that they didn't have enough to eat, that they were simply going to die on the journey. And so God provides for them - manna, bread from heaven that they can consume daily. And they can trust that the following day God will provide again. The Exodus of course has an ending in the promised land, a place where the

slaves can call their own; where these wanderers can set up homes and cease their wandering; where the tribes can become a nation whose purpose is to continue to worship and serve God, but who in return receive the bread and honey of a promised land.

Equally Jesus reminds them that this Exodus wasn't without its sacrifices; nobody who left Egypt arrived in the promised land. It's spoken of as a punishment for failing to trust in God, but even Moses, who had led the people out of slavery, even he would die before they inherited this new, this promised place, this home. Jesus is reminding them that the manna, though given by God, only fed their human needs, their need for food, their need for security of food, their need to feel loved. Yet here is Jesus, telling the people of Israel 2 000 years ago, that he is here as the bread which continues to provide and meets more than simply our human physical needs, but meets our spiritual needs, and goes beyond.

Two thousand years ago, the people of Israel were looking for a Messiah, somebody who could be just like Moses, who would lead them out from captivity. I suspect in reality they hoped somebody who would boot the Romans out rather than lead them to a new land, but someone who would re-bring that security of having their own country, their own land, their own nationhood, the ability to grow their own food.

Jesus speaks into that by declaring that he has come not simply for this life, but for eternal life. He is not there to boot the Romans out, but to complete a different journey that the people of Israel have been on since the time of Egypt. That journey is one of being holy. Throughout the time from Egypt onwards, God has sent prophets and priests and wise people to teach the people of Israel what it is to be the true children of God.

Sometimes they've listened and sometimes they've ignored; sometimes they've followed, sometimes they've strayed and gone their own way. Rather than continuing this endless procession of prophets, God sends his only son. God is showing us what it is to be a child of God, a holy one by giving us a direct example - Jesus himself. In this Jesus reminds us that he is the only one who has seen the Father because he is the only one who has come from the Father. He is the only one who knows what this child-parent relationship with God should look like. This relationship of trust. Of us trusting in God and becoming more like Jesus and therefore God, day by day.

Jesus was showing the people of Israel, two thousand years ago, that they hadn't yet made it. They weren't yet holy and that wasn't because they were living in a conquered land, but because they were failing to live the way that God had wanted them to.

And so what about us? Well I wonder if we are still in the middle of a journey. Perhaps the end of this journey is more in sight; perhaps we have a greater understanding that where we were in society two years ago, wasn't necessarily a good place or wasn't necessarily the best place for us to be. And since then we have been on a journey. Some of us have enjoyed this time of less social contact, of lockdown, of taking absolute care - some of us have absolutely hated it. Some are looking forward to edging back towards normality, others didn't like normality in the first place. And many of us will be looking at this time of reducing restrictions with anxiety and concern. Will this work? or will we simply see a resurgence of Covid? Will the vaccine wall hold? or will we see huge numbers being admitted to hospital and deaths rising?

The answer to these questions, I don't have. Perhaps it's because of the lack of having answers that we become quite anxious about the future. Yet perhaps we're on another journey, a spiritual journey, a journey where we have realized that the world as it was, was not holy; was not all that God had created or wanted it to be. Perhaps we as the church hadn't necessarily helped in bringing about true salvation to the whole world. Instead perhaps at times we were too worried with ourselves to worry about those things happening outside our buildings. We too have been on a journey.

I wonder if, in this journey we may have become more reliant on God. Maybe in the anxiety-driven times we have become more open to spiritual practices, to daily prayer, to reading our scripture. Even when we cannot be together, people have found ways to communicate with each other, and perhaps had deeper conversations on the telephone or on zoom than we would have had at coffee at the end of a service. Perhaps as we begin to re-form, we might understand a little bit more about being community. I believe the church is the community of God, not that we are special or above the rest of the world, but that we have a particular role to play in the world. A role that speaks of all that God has done for us: the manna from heaven that he gave to our Israelite ancestors; the bread of life that he gave to us in Jesus Christ; the love poured out for each one of us as Christ died on the cross.

It is for me no coincidence that when we celebrate holy communion, we remind ourselves that Jesus is the bread of life. That that meal shared is a continuance of the last supper, - food for our journey; food for our bodies; food for our souls. So I wonder how is it with your soul? Are you closer to God now than when the pandemic

began, and we were running round like mad things? Have you taken time to rebuild a prayer life; time to study scripture; time with God?

As things begin to restart, as lives begin to become re-entwined with friends and family and there are things to do and be done, have you made space and will you keep that space for your spiritual journey, your discipleship, your becoming more like Christ day by day?

The Israelites looked back on the Exodus, and they understood it came with pain, but it came with joy, for they learned to be the children of God. I wonder, when we look back; when we look back at this time of pandemic, when our ancestors look back at what is our present, will we also see a time that was, yes very difficult, but a time that gave us time to get back to God? I hope this week that you find time to get back to God

Amen

Hymn: StF 465 – Guide me O thou great Jehovah

- 1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.**
- 2. Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.**
- 3. When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,**

**land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.**

William Williams (1717–1791)

translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

We offer our prayers for others to the God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, already present in every place, already bringing good out of every evil, already holding in love every person.

We hold in our prayers those who feel surrounded by chaos at this time
Lord, give calm.
Lord, give calm.

We hold in our prayers those who walk in the valley of the shadow of death
Lord, give light.
Lord, give light.

We hold in our prayers those who are oppressed by violence and war
Lord, give peace.
Lord, give peace.

We hold in our prayers those who seek to lead our communities, our nations and our world
Lord, give wisdom.
Lord, give wisdom.

We hold in our prayers those who find it hard to believe, who struggle with doubt
Lord, give courage.
Lord, give courage.

We hold in our prayers those with whom we try to share the Good News of your love

Lord, give grace.

Lord, give grace.

We rejoice in your promise to be with us always,
to the end of the age, as we place all those for
whom we pray into the care of our God

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

We say 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.
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**

The Offering & prayer

Heavenly Father accept these gifts today, that by
the power of your Holy Spirit and through our
actions and decisions we will see your Kingdom
come and your will be done. In the name of Jesus
we pray,
Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 504 – May the mind of Christ my
saviour

**1. May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.**

- 2. May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.**
- 3. May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.**
- 4. May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting —
this is victory.**
- 5. May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.**

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859–1928)

Prayer & blessing

Creator God you are Lord of all time and space.
You are present in this place, in this moment. We
go out into the days ahead to encounter more of
you. Bless us as we go in the name of the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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Complete Mission Praise 38 – As we are gathered

John Daniels

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StF 504 – May the mind of Christ my saviour

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859–1928)

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StF 465 – Guide me O thou great Jehovah

William Williams (1717–1791)

translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)

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Other Songs

StF 363 – My Jesus, My Saviour

Darlene Zschech (*b.* 1965)

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