

Worship for Seventh Sunday of Easter (*Sunday in Ascensiontide*)
(complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Circuit on the 7th Sunday of Easter. Our preacher this week is Malcolm Aldridge, and Mark Rowland and Candy Evans are our readers. Thanks go to them and to the technical team for putting everything together. My name is Pam Weston and I am the worship leader this week.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Let us pray.

Holy God, we have come to worship you, we have come just as we are with all our doubts and fears.

May we be inspired by a fresh encounter with you today.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 556 – Just as I am

- 1. Just as I am, without one plea
but that you died to set me free,
and at your bidding, 'Come to me!'
O Lamb of God, I come!**
- 2. Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come!**
- 3. Just as I am, you will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:
because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!**
- 4. Just as I am — your love unknown
has broken every barrier down —**

**now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!**

- 5. Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, depth and height to
prove,
here for a time and then above,
O Lamb of God, I come!**

Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871)
adapted by Jubilate Hymns (alt.)

Opening Prayers

God of yesterday, tomorrow and today,
we are children of the world you love and care for.

We praise you, heavenly Father,
for calling us into relationship with you.

We praise you, Lord Jesus,
for the power of your name and the protection of your prayers.

We praise you, Holy Spirit,
for your guidance and gifts that enable us to draw others to you.

For you are faithful in times of uncertainty,
strong when we are weak,
and the breath of all our being,
the energy of all our doing and the peace of all our resting.

Amen.

Forgive us, gracious God,
when we have turned away from your word
and immersed ourselves in the distractions of the world.

Forgive us, when we have sought to belong to the world

and compromised your truth to fit in.
Forgive us, when we have bickered among
ourselves
and not shown the world that we are one.
Forgive us, when we have distanced ourselves
from those you have called us to serve.
Forgive us, O God; protect us and unite us.
In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Gracious God,
we thank you for the enduring prayer of Jesus for
his disciples
which reaches and reassures us today as we walk
in their footsteps,
reminding us that we are not alone
but protected, empowered, forgiven,
and surrounded by your grace every step of the
way.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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 our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil,
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, now and forever
Amen**

Hymn: StF 362 – Meekness and majesty

**1. Meekness and majesty,
manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony —**

**the man who is God.
Lord of eternity,
dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility
and washes our feet.**

***Oh, what a mystery —
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!***

**2. Father's pure radiance,
perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience
to death on a cross:
suffering to give us life,
conquering through sacrifice —
and as they crucify,
prays, 'Father forgive.'**

***Oh, what a mystery —
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!***

**3. Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
love indestructible
in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity,
stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity
to the heights of his throne.**

***Oh, what a mystery —
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!***

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 1 (NIVUK)

¹Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,

²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

³That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water,

which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
whatever they do prospers.

⁴Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the
righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Gospel John 17:6-19 (NIVUK)

Jesus prays for his disciples

⁶I have revealed you to those whom you gave
me out of the world. They were yours; you gave
them to me and they have obeyed your word.

⁷Now they know that everything you have given
me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words
you gave me and they accepted them. They
knew with certainty that I came from you, and
they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them.
I am not praying for the world, but for those you
have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is
yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has
come to me through them. ¹¹I will remain in the
world no longer, but they are still in the world,
and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect

them by the power of your name, the name you
gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.
¹²While I was with them, I protected them and
kept them safe by that name you gave me. None
has been lost except the one doomed to
destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³I am coming to you now, but I say these things
while I am still in the world, so that they may
have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴I
have given them your word and the world has
hated them, for they are not of the world any
more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not
that you take them out of the world but that you
protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of
the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them
by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me
into the world, I have sent them into the world.
¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may
be truly sanctified.

Sermon

Good morning! Today is the Sunday of Christian
Aid Week; but for that organisation and many
others with similar objectives and ideals it is just
the beginning of another year of campaigning
and reaching out to poor and deprived.
Communities who need the love of Jesus Christ,
both spiritually through the Christian faith and
practically through empowerment, aid and
assistance in dealing with the effects of climate
change.

Whilst I am going to talk about that topic in a
little while I would first like to take a look at this
week's reading from John's Gospel passage that
we have just heard. It would be easy to pass over
this as irrelevant in terms of today's concerns
about climate change but in fact it embodies a
commitment that has passed on to us as
disciples of Christ and endures for ever.

To put the passage in context it took place on the evening of the last supper. Jesus prayed for his disciples' safe custody in his Father's care as he himself prepared for his own crucifixion and the end of his life on earth.

It tells how Jesus' disciples were originally given to him by God the Father in the first place and how Jesus has taught and nurtured them since, in order that they might continue his mission in the world; a mission based entirely on The Father's will and a mission which would glorify Jesus and The Father too. That mission was and is to reveal God's loving nature to the whole of mankind and to spread the Christian gospel as the way of life. The end result would be the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

We continue this tradition and commitment today as disciples of Christ under God's protection. We too are required to spread the Gospel of Christ revealing God's love to all nations including their God-given right to share equally in his creation. Only by engaging with this mission can we continue to build His Kingdom.

One of the major stumbling blocks in our mission and quest today, and no doubt for many years, is the problem of climate change. I return now to my opening comments about Christian Aid week because their focus for 2021 is the same problem. This is a problem that affects or will eventually affect every country, state and individual person in our world as we know it.

The difficulty for many of us though is trying to understand and get to grips with it. Endless statistics are thrown at us to prove the danger to mankind, but although the problem is one which has been creeping up on us for several decades, the crunch point always seems to be some way off in the future.

It is very much a matter of realisation of the urgency. We read of catastrophic disasters around the world most of which seem a long way from our hometowns but all around more extreme weather is being encountered, even in the UK. Unless these worldwide events are drawn directly to our attention though we may be blissfully unaware of what is going on.

Another factor which shelters us from reality is that our nation has the wealth, the science and the infrastructure to deal with climate change to a certain extent and it is too easy to think that science holds the solution to any problem that arises.

But what about Christianity and our mission to establish the Kingdom of God? I am sure that all of us accept our stewardship of the perfectly designed and crafted creation that our loving God has given us. We bear a responsibility for the whole of the world and it is not just for us here in the temperate climes of the UK. There are eight billion other souls out there all of whom are entitled to share the benefits as well.

It is this inherited stewardship to which the world and we ourselves must turn now. When we think about God, we have to stretch our minds and our thoughts because his love is much wider and deeper than we can conceive.

All languages, all races and all peoples are readily understood and regarded equally by him.

Fine churches, elaborate prayers, designer liturgy and all the trappings of western life and philosophy do not give us special access to God. A Bishop is no more entitled to an audience with God than an infant child desperately seeking food, water and shelter in a Nigerian village.

If we have the wealth and science to mitigate climate change effects, surely we must share it

out with poorer or less developed nations in the ratio which their situation demands. Why should they bear the burden of numerous industrial revolutions and unthinkable exploitation of their natural resources which have then been used to generate wealth, security and military domination for the superpowers?

The poorer undeveloped nations are already well behind us and are in danger of getting even further behind as a result of climate change effect.

But they are entitled to their share of God's creation and the basic pleasures and security that it should bring.

We cannot measure our God nor can science for that matter. He is bigger, wiser, stronger and more loving than we could ever understand and yet he knows each individual's innermost thoughts and feelings even before we conceive them.

By ignoring climate change, by exacerbating it through our own reckless usage of resource, by secreting wealth away from the poor and by lack of political pressure and action and most of all by lack of prayer we are going against God's will and Jesus' living mission.

Prayer, donation, fund raising, political and corporate lobbying need to be prominent features of our mission as we seek to pass on our wealth, our science, our experience and knowledge so that those in need can cope with what is happening.

Practical action as individuals too is very important to reduce emissions, toxic waste and excessive use of fossil fuels.

Climate action Sunday is on 5th September 2021 and should be a key marker in this mission to halt climate change in its tracks and enable and

empower the poor and disadvantaged to mitigate the ill-effects that have already taken place.

I wonder what will happen on that day when we look at what has been achieved and what is in progress; will there be concrete evidence of real change or will we be just lamenting the fact that nothing has changed and that all we have heard is just fine words and empty promises?

May the Lord protect us all and inspire us in our mission!

Amen

Affirmation of Faith

Do we believe in God the Father who made the world?

We believe in God the Father who made the world.

Do we believe in Jesus Christ, his Son, who redeemed humankind?

We believe in Jesus Christ, his Son, who redeemed humankind.

Do we believe in the Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God.

This is the faith of our church.

AMEN

Hymn: StF 416 – There's a wideness in God's mercy

- 1. There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.**
- 2. There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;**

**there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.**

- 3. There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.**
- 4. For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.**
- 5. But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.**
- 6. If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.**

Frederick William Faber (1814–1863)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord, we thank you that you came to earth for
us,
sacrificed yourself for us,
died and were buried for our sins.

On this ascension Sunday may we give thanks for
the greatest gift of all, your son Jesus.

We give thanks that we know that one day Jesus
will return,
we thank you that when Jesus ascended into
heaven we were not left alone, the Holy Spirit
moves through us this day and always.

Amen.

Lord, as you raised Christ from the dead and
seated him at your right hand may we know your
presence this day.

In particular we pray for those in positions of
leadership and power,
may they act with mercy and humility and may
your will be done through them.

We pray for your church across the world, in
particular we pray for those communities who
have been persecuted because they pray to you.
May they know your love and touch as they
continue to struggle to praise you,
Lord grant them strength and knowledge that
one day we shall all live in a place of endless
praise and worship.

Amen.

A Prayer for Christian Aid Week:

Great God,
Who makes the sun to rise, and opens the
heavens,
Hear the cry of the people
Who sow in hope for rain, but reap only despair,
Hear the cry of the people
Seeking shelter from the storm, their hopes and
homes submerged
Hear the cry of the people
When creation is hitting back, with rage and
resistance
Give us hope, grant us salvation,
Give us a new relationship with creation
With reverence to tend this gift from You
And say once again of the earth and all you
created
It is GOOD.

The Offering & prayer

Thank you, gracious God, for all we have
received.

Accept the gifts we offer,
and may we work to help bring about justice and
peace in your world.

In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 706 – Longing for Light

1. **Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.**

*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

2. **Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.**

*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

3. **Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.**

*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

4. **Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.**

*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

5. **Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.**

*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Prayer & blessing

May God bless us with wonder at creation's glory.
May God bless us with fury at creation's spoiling.
May God bless us with courage at this critical hour.
And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
rest upon us and on all creation,
this day and for the future to come.
Amen.

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StF 556 – Just as I am

Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871) *adapted by* Jubilate Hymns (*alt.*)

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StF 706 – Longing for Light

Bernadette Farrell (*b.* 1957)

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StF 362 – Meekness and majesty

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

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StF 416 – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Frederick William Faber (1814–1863)

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Bible Verses

NIV

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If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on
swc.katetennyson@gmail.com