

A service for Sunday 26th April



Note: The hymn numbers are from "Singing the Faith" the current hymnbook of the Methodist Church, you will need to look them up if your Church uses a different book. I have also put links into YouTube for the hymns, my choice might not be yours, so by all means look for alternatives.

Bible Reading: Psalm 116

Hymn 446: I will offer up my life in Spirit and truth <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPf7qUZrHlc>

Prayer

Creator God, who breathed the world into existence, who called men and women to lead your people in paths of righteousness, who spoke your word through prophets, who loved the world so much that you sent your only son, who showed us the way, the truth and the life through his ministry, we come and we worship you. When all felt to be lost, you raised him from the dead and revealed your glory to the early Church. We can not understand, but we who live centuries later worship believe and worship you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

God of love, you have led us into the ways of light, forgive us when we have chosen to walk in the darkness, forgive us for when we have not acted with love, when our words have hurt others and even when our thoughts have been impure. We pray that you will cleanse us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Collect for the day

God of life and love, your Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. Open our eyes that we may see him in his redeeming work, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Bible Reading Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

Whenever I see the fields of rapeseed, I am reminded of the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs London weekend that happened during mid-May each year. The MAYC colours were green and yellow and as we travelled by coach from Yorkshire to London, I used to be thrilled to see the green and yellow fields, it always made me believe that God had his hand on what was happening. I remember the very first London Weekend I attended in 1979, I came home and thought "life will never be the same again" a feeling I've had many times since.

As Peter addresses the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, the infant Church is in a vulnerable place, God has poured out his Spirit on them and now the vital next stage is how they respond. This is the one point where the Church stands on the threshold of growth, or it dies for once and for all, the work of Jesus comes to an end. Jesus has already commissioned Peter to lead his Church, this is Peter's response, no empty talk, no blundering, but this is where the work begins.

I believe that we are at a pivotal time in the life of the 21st century Church. The main agenda of my training at theological college was "the Church is dying, you are the folk to turn that around" as and when we emerge from the end of this experience in 2020, we will either be stronger and ready to work with God on the next stage of his mission, or we will have weakened and the church will be more vulnerable than ever.

Challenge:

Look back at the last five weeks since all of this began, how is God using you during this time, has your faith changed? Has your faith strengthened? What have you to be thankful for in this experience?

Hymn 548

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuyf1YQvcwY>

Or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrDw08JZtxw> A Gospel Choir, made me smile!

Epistle

1 Peter 1: 17-23

You may have heard me recall this experience before. As a teenager and Sunday School teacher, I encouraged my class of thirteen year olds who were forever complaining about Church worship to be creative and come up with something new, we sat for the best part of three quarters of an hour and came up with five hymns (of our choosing) two prayers, two bible readings and a sermon (much shorter and snappier than we were used to hearing) I remember feeling deflated, in the end, there was nothing new.

As Peter addresses the early Church, he encourages them not simply to continue to do the old, tried and tested, the things that meant doggedly sticking to what has gone before, because surely if our forefathers did it then it is surely right. He reminds them that they are born anew, different people because of what they have experienced, alive and Spirit led.

The baptism of John at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus was about repentance, dying to our old selves and rising anew, cleaned, purified in God, not simply our old selves washed, but new in the sight of God. Here, Peter is calling early Church to die to their old selves and rise renewed in Christ.

- *Peter refers to people living in reverent fear during their time in the wilderness.*
- *Think for a moment about what causes you to fear during this time. Our fear of catching the virus, our fear for others we know, our fear of loneliness, isolation, of being able to face the world again when we have freedom of movement.*

Prayer

In these days of lock down and isolation where life feels to be difficult and lonely for so many, try to be still and silent for a few moments.

Pray for the Church of Christ, that we might be Easter people, filled with the love of God, seeking to work in his way in the world today, pray for an end to divisions and a new Church grown in love and unity.

Pray for the people of the world, at a time when we are forced to stay at home, remember those who have no homes, those who have to go out to supply their basic needs like water and sanitation. Remember those whose homes have been destroyed and pray for the rulers of nations as they make difficult decisions

Pray for our own country, our government, our NHS workers and all those in key roles in our nation, putting their own health at risk, so that others can be looked after. People who face the pandemic so soon after having their homes and livelihoods destroyed by the recent floods only eight weeks ago.

Pray for people who find themselves isolated, remembering particularly those who find themselves in dark places, separated from those they love particularly at difficult times in their lives. Remember the people on our prayer list this week.

Pray for those who have lost loved ones, remembering the many people who died due to causes other than the pandemic. Remember those who are not getting the opportunity to say goodbye and can't have funeral services to celebrate the lives of those they have lost.

Finally, pray that God will strengthen you to cope with this difficult time and that you may feel the power of his risen life in you today. Amen

The Lord's prayer:

Hymn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LtgqibMl0E> organ accompaniment only

Lord Jesus, in the days of old
Two walked thee in waning light;
And loves blind instinct made them bold
To crave thy presence through the night
As night descends, we too would pray
O leave us not at close of day!

Did not either hearts within them burn?
And, though their Lord, they failed to know,
Did not their spirits inly yearn?
They could not let the stranger go.
Much more must we who know thee pray:
O leave us not at close of day!

Perchance we have not always wist
Who has been with us by the way;
Amid day's uproar we have missed
some word that thou has had to say.
In silent night, O Saviour dear,
We would not fail thy voice to hear.

Day is far spent, and night is nigh;
Stay with us, Saviour, through the night;
Talk with us, touch us tenderly,
Lead us to peace, to rest, to light;
Dispel our darkness with thy face,
Radiant with resurrection grace.

Nor this night only, blessed Lord,
We, every day and every hour,
Would walk with thee Emmaus-ward
To hear thy voice of love and power;
And every night would by thy side
Look, listen, and be satisfied.

James Ashcroft Noble (1844-96)

Gospel:

Luke 24: 13-35

The above hymn wasn't selected to be part of Singing the faith, which I think is sad because I think the words are lovely.



The image above on the left was painted by Janet Brooks Gerloff an American artist born in Kansas USA in 1947 the one on the right is a 19th century painting by Robert Zund a Swiss landscape painter.

The two pictures depict very different images of the same story, the one on the left showing two dark characters, mourning the loss of a very dear friend, the one who would deliver them, there is a feeling that all is lost, hope is gone, Jesus is dead. The risen Christ is depicted almost in a ghostly style, which troubles me, I believe that Christ is alive, in human form once again, not a ghost, but a real man, so the illustration causes me to feel uneasy.

The picture on the right is very different and at first glance, it maybe makes you feel much more upbeat, but I struggle equally with this image. Christ clad in white is sharing his message with them, unlocking the truth and they are hanging on his every word, looking at him, the sun is shining, there are nice fluffy clouds in the pale blue sky and in the distance

you can just make out Emmaus. My problem with this picture is that it is just a bit too good to be true.

The two on the road are grief stricken, they are in a dark place, they have a seven miles walk home and are deep in conversation. The stranger who joins them appears not to know what has been going on in Jerusalem, they weren't sure whether or not to believe the things they'd heard about the resurrection. Even though the teaching of Jesus is inspiring, they still don't realise that it is he.

The thing that always strikes me about this story is the journey, they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus burdened by all that had happened, they are people walking into the darkness. When they recognise who Jesus is, he is taken away from them. Their response? They head straight back to Jerusalem, my guess is that this time there is a spring in their step, planning what they going to tell the others. They are transformed through their experience.

Sometimes in our darkest hours, we feel the physical presence of Jesus walking alongside us and we can not fail to be transformed by him.

- *Think about those times in your life when life has felt to be a struggle and how you have been lifted up by those around you and by God's love.*
- *Think about occasions in your life when you have felt the power of God's transforming love and just wanted to share your excitement with others.*

Hymn 293

All heaven declares <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPkZAJA610k>

Prayer

*Lord have mercy on us,
Come and heal our land.
Cleanse with your fire, heal with your touch,
Humbly we bow and call upon You now.
O Lord, have mercy on us,
O Lord, have mercy on us.*

*Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Amen.