



Sunday 27th September

Mission Sunday ~Cherith Withington

PREPARATION

Welcome

Leader Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
All and also with you.

Leader This is the day that the Lord has made.
All Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Hymn 449 Love divine

Love Divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast;
let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest:
take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its Beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise thee, without
ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee,
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise

Opening activity ~ What happened next?

Confession

God our Father,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins.
For turning away from you,
and ignoring your will for our lives;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For behaving just as we wish,
without thinking of you;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For failing you by what we do,
and think and say;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you
by temptations in the world about us;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For living as if we were ashamed
to belong to your Son;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

Absolution

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Collect (16th Sunday after Trinity)

Leader Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us:
 Open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with
 reverence and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus
 Christ our Lord.

Amen

Mission partner update - Cherith Withington

This Sunday is our mission Sunday in the parish dedicated to Cherith, who is one of our mission partners working with Church army as an Evangelist in Liverpool. It's been very encouraging to hear that In spite of Covid-19 and all the restrictions it has brought about on gatherings, Cherith has managed to carry on proclaiming Christ via the wonders of Zoom. In the last month alone, she has managed to lead a very successful summer play scheme that had over 50 families attend, she currently runs a toddler church once a week with between 15 to 20 families attending, and she is still doing assemblies in at least three schools via Zoom and other pre-recorded material that is played during these assemblies. Like many of us, she is grateful that technology has enabled mission to carry on, using it to witness and disciple God's people

But she still needs our prayers and support. Prayers for among other things, more opportunities and means to minister, prayers for Liverpool as it's currently on the 'Covid watchlist. Please also do support as well by giving financially towards her ministry, and this can be done by giving cash, cheques written to 'Parish of St Peter, Woking' and giving online via www.stpeterwoking.org/giving. Prayers and support will be greatly appreciated.

Hymn Waymaker

You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You, I worship You
You are Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper
Light in the darkness, my God, that is who You are
You are here, touching every heart
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, healing every heart
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, turning lives around
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, mending every heart
I worship You, I worship You, oh
That is who You are
That is who You are

That is who You are
That is who You are

Even when I don't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working

Bible readings

Mark 16.15-18 ~ Rosemary McCrum (St Marks)

¹⁵ He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on people who are ill, and they will get well.'

Acts 28.16-31

¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: 'My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.'

²¹ They replied, 'We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.'

²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: 'The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶ “Go to this people and say,
‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.’

²⁷ For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.”

²⁸ ‘Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!’ ³⁰ For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance!

Sermon Acts 28.16–31 What happens next?

My favourite part of the TV programme ‘A Question of Sport’ was the ‘What happened next?’ part, though I don’t think they have it on the show regularly now. A clip of a football match or a tennis game or a horse race is shown and then paused at a key moment and the contestants have to guess what happens next? Usually it is someone falling over spectacularly or getting hit by a ball or an animal entering the field of play.



Good novels and biographies keep you reading because you want to know what happens next, especially those page-turners that keep you up far too late. The book of Acts is a compelling story of life after Jesus’ return to heaven as the church is born and the kingdom of God grows across the Roman empire. We have looked at many of the lesser, more ordinary characters over the summer and now are looking at the extraordinary person of Paul, finding out what happens next as he went on trial before Felix, Festus and Agrippa and then appealed to Caesar and heads for Rome. Last week we saw how he was God’s reassuring presence in the terrible storm that ultimately led to the shipwreck off Malta, with the miracle of everyone surviving. And now as we read from the very last chapter of Acts we are looking for an exciting conclusion and an

encouraging ending as Paul arrives at Rome waiting to see Caesar, emperor Nero himself, who will decide his fate.

As we will see later, the very end of Acts may feel a bit of an anti-climax, as if leaving the story open for a sequel. In the meantime we see Paul being put under house arrest on arrival in Rome with a reasonable amount of freedom as he awaits an audience with the emperor. Paul being Paul wastes no time in meeting with the local Jewish leaders for an opportunity to share with them that Jesus is their long awaited Messiah. They had not particularly heard of Paul, but had heard of this 'sect' who believed Jesus was the Messiah and wanted to know more.

So Paul uses their scriptures to explain how Jesus fulfilled its prophecies and many were convinced and came to faith. However, as always, many did not believe. Paul then quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10, a passage that Jesus quotes after giving the parable of the sower. The quote is made to indicate how many people, like the seed sown on the path or rocky or weedy ground in the parable, will never turn their hearts towards God's truth, however much they hear his word or see God's works in action, because it costs too much, they would have to repent, change and turn from their self-centred ways.

I'm sure we all know family members or friends who have been exposed to God's truth for many years, who we have shared our faith with in detail, but who have never made that commitment to follow Christ. It's hard for us to bear and can be discouraging, but the bible tells us it will happen even when people are exposed to great evangelists like Paul and even Jesus himself didn't convert everyone he met. Our role is to be faithful in our witness, through our words and actions and to be persistent in prayer for them.

Paul's last recorded words to these Jewish leaders and in the book of Acts are how God's salvation in Jesus is now going to be proclaimed actively to the Gentiles where the ground is fertile. Much of the book of Acts covers the problems this caused many of the Jewish believers in the early church, because they had always understood that salvation was just for the Jews. But Paul knew that the way to salvation was open to everyone, and always had been as he frequently quoted scripture to show this, and he had been proclaiming the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike without discrimination.

I'm sure we all believe that the gospel is for everyone. That everyone, no matter what race or religion they are, what background they come from, what terrible things they may have done in the past can know salvation

though Jesus. But the question I often ask myself is what am I doing about sharing my faith with those who are very different to me. At one level it is easier to speak of my faith to people who have had a Christian upbringing or have the same values as me, because they have the background of faith, although they can be overfamiliar or complacent with faith and keep their hearts closed. But it is usually significantly harder for me to share my faith with someone of a much younger generation, or from another religious upbringing, or who only know Jesus as a swear word, because I don't know how to explain my faith to them. And so I make no effort to do so, it is too hard. I am worried I will make a fool of myself so I do nothing. And as a parish it is much easier to run groups for people like us rather than trying to reach out to the unchurched and the marginalised. That's why we started up Messy church, Refresh Café, the Light event at Hallowe'en. It can be slow going drawing people to faith who are so different to us, but they are the 'Gentiles' of our day and we, as individuals, and a parish are called to share Jesus' good news with them.

Luke ends his tales of the early church in the book of Acts with Paul under house arrest for two years telling us how he boldly preached the good news of Jesus, welcoming all who came to hear this amazing man speak of an even more amazing man. That's great, but I really want to know what happens next. Does Paul get to meet emperor Nero? If so what does he say to him? Does he proclaim Jesus to Nero? (I'm sure he does, he did with all the other top ranking people he met – Felix, Festus, King Agrippa etc) How does Nero react?

Unfortunately we don't know, we have no writings around that tell us this, although piecing together church history it seems that Paul was released (after meeting Nero?) because he wrote letters 2 Timothy and Titus at a later date. He was probably rearrested and then eventually executed for his faith. We don't quite know why Luke ended the book of Acts as he did without giving us the story of Paul meeting emperor Nero, though it may well be that he wrote it whilst with Paul in Rome as an account of what had led Paul to that point and either never got the chance to write the rest or didn't feel he needed to add any more. After all it is fitting that the story of the growth of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit, as Acts is, should come from an insignificant backwater of the Roman empire, Judea, to the centre of that mighty empire itself, Rome. This is not a small sect that would burn out after a few years – and there were many of them – but the Kingdom of God growing in size, breadth and stature that would one day become the official religion of the Roman

empire when Emperor Constantine was converted and ultimately spread to all corners of the globe.

So what happens next is the stories of millions of ordinary followers of Jesus over 20 centuries living out their faith in Christ and slowly changing the whole world just as Jesus said would happen. You and me are part of that continuing story and the book of Acts gives us a great example of how we improvise our part in the script. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit, inspired by the scriptures and supported by our fellow Christians to live out the good news of Jesus through loving acts of kindness, a passion for justice, bringing physical and emotional healing to people and telling people that there is a God who loves them so much that he came down to earth to save them and give them hope.

Whatever is going on in your life right now, however you are affected by Coronavirus, what can you do with the gifts, resources and time you have to follow the example of Paul and the other characters in Acts so that you can shape for the glory of God what happens next?

Hymn **1264 Christ be in my waking**

Christ be in my waking,
As the sun is rising,
In my day of working,
With me every hour.
Christ be in my resting,
As the day is ending,
Calming and refreshing,
Watching through the night.

Christ be in my thinking,
And my understanding,
Guarding me from evil,
Walking in the light.

Christ be in my speaking,
Every word a blessing,
Pure and not deceiving,
Grace to all who hear.

Jesus, this is my devotion:
All my life to know You,
Every day to walk with You.

Saviour, You're my deepest
longing,
You're the One I live for,
Teach me, Lord, to walk with You.
Christ be in my gladness
For the joy of living,
Thankful for the goodness
Of the Father's hand.

Christ be in my sorrow,
In my day of darkness,
Knowing that I follow
In the steps He trod.

Christ when hope has faded,
Nothing left to cling to,
Every pleasure jaded,
Every well is dry.

Christ the loving Shepherd
Draws me with His kindness,
Leads me from the desert
To the streams of life.

Apostles' Creed

**All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers ~ Mark Grubb, All Souls

Last month I was fortunate to visit Coventry Cathedral
where I found this prayer...

God of healing and hope,
As we remember those whom we have lost
And those whose lives have been changed forever by the
pandemic,
Help us to know that your love,
Stronger than death, holds each of us secure,
And that nothing on earth or beyond
Can ever separate us from that love.

In Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Creator Lord, thank you for our beautiful world. We are surrounded by
incredible diversity of life in all its forms. The more we learn of your
creation the more we understand how fragile it is and how much we
depend upon even the smallest plants and animals for our existence. We
know we have fallen short as custodians of this world and some of the
damage we have wrought cannot be undone.



Guide and inspire the leaders of nations in their day to day decisions. Grant them courage to break with the past patterns of exploitation and disregard for the consequences of our industrial and agricultural activities. Give them the strength to take risks for our world and turn our current difficulties into an opportunity to create jobs and businesses to repair the damage we have done to our fragile planet.

We pray that leaders of companies large and small will understand and accept their responsibilities for the environmental impact of their organisations, that they will place the interests of the world ahead of those of maximising profits.

Father, to love your creation is to love you, help us all to recognise our own personal responsibility for the world around us and take ownership for our everyday decisions of what we use and what we throw away, how we travel and where we go.

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works and teach us to be more responsible in our stewardship.

For the sake of him through whom all things were made,
your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Almighty and merciful God,

Your Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own;

Look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from wars, persecution, or economic failure and become vulnerable, homeless and exploited.

Bless those who work to bring them relief,

Inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts

and guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and of peace,

In the name of Jesus or Lord, **Amen**

We pray for Cherith Withington.

Thank you, Father, that she has been able to complete her studies after four years of work.

Give her strength and courage to continue to proclaim your Gospel despite having to work via the internet. Allay her fears about Covid in Liverpool and we pray that the situation does not get any worse.

Grant her wisdom and understanding in her role as interim lead evangelist that she may teach with authority and clarity to all sections of the community.

We pray also for our other mission partners, Malcom Pritchard and Stephanie Cox, as they continue to proclaim the Word of God in Uganda and Gravesend.

Loving Father, as your son sent his disciples to take the Good News to all of mankind, we bring to you Cherith, Malcom and Steph who have devoted their lives to work in your name. Continue to inspire them in your love and your word and keep them safe from harm wherever they are called to go.

In the name of Jesus or Lord, **Amen**

Almighty God, we pray for your blessing on all who share in the life and work of our Church and parish. In the ministry of word and sacrament, in teaching and pastoral care, especially at this time of desperate need for so many of our brothers and sisters.

Loving Father, we pray for those in need of our love and care in our parish, especially:

Peter & Eileen Bliss, Olive Park, Catherine McCormack, Joy Storkey and John Hunter.

We pray for the bereaved families of Graham Daborn and Bob Ilsley. Console them in their loss that they may find comfort and healing in your love.

Lord Jesus, preserve your church family in the parish of St Peter, fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us the courage to live your Word in our lives. **Amen**

Now please join me as we close our time of prayer with the words of the Lord's Prayer:

**All 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 us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen**

Notices *(See Notes & News)*

Hymn 651 The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy

The kingdom of God
is justice and joy;
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory
in Jesus we know
and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace;
the captives are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share;
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice:
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross:
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal;
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call
and all things cry 'Glory!'
to God all in all.

The dismissal

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

Worshipping ▶ Loving ▶ Sharing ▶ Growing

