

Sunday 5 May 2024

The Sixth Sunday of Easter



Sermon and prayers of intercession © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

All He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

HYMN 1 Love divine, all loves excelling
Love divine all loves excelling

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

[\(different version of the hymn\)](#)

The Preparation

All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.

Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil
and confess our sins in penitence and faith,
firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments
and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

All Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us
to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Acts 10:44-end

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the First Letter of John

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. *1 John 5:1-6*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 A new commandment [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

[Jesus said], 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.' *John 15:9-17*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Today's Gospel reading is full of astonishing promises. Jesus calls us friends. Jesus has made everything known to us. Jesus chose us. Our joy can be made complete. And all of them are bound up in love.

My first thought is to say, 'Yeah ... right!' because, to be frank, I struggle to see the evidence. The world is clearly a nasty place and seems to be getting nastier. Even in churches I hear and see that which is brutal, selfish and—yes—un-Christian, so I reread the passage and unfortunately see at its heart a circular argument, because Jesus says not only, 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love' but also 'I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another': taken together they seem to say we can keep God's commandment if we can keep God's commandments; we can love if we can love. John's epistle says exactly the same thing in essentially the same words, 'the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments'. It all prompts the question, 'What if I can't keep the commandments; what if I can't love in this way?' Yikes.

The way to resolve the problem is to note two things in the Bible. The Bible is clear that God is love. It's saying that the character of God is so bound up in this way of being we call love that they are inseparable. When we listen to the God within us then, because of the way He has marvellously made us and programmed us, the behaviour caused by being filled with God is love. God is love; love is from God. We know a tree is an apple tree because it grows apples; we know a cat is a cat because its babies are cats; and we know a Christian is a Christian because they love.

And we need to be clear about that love. The Bible has a great many words for love—love of family, love of friends, love in a sensual way, and so on. But for the Bible there is only one form of love. The word is almost untranslatable: it's *agapé*, which is the love that comes from God and (yes, you guessed it) is God. In all of this morning's passages, when Jesus or St John tell us to love, they are saying that we must let God live inside us and the outworking of that God indwelling in our soul will be the kind of *agapé* love that God desires and commands.

Taken together, God is *agapé* love and *agapé* love is from God. Let's explore with that identity in mind. God says that He wants us to be filled with himself. That's where the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, kicks in, because it describes the Holy Spirit coming from Heaven and filling yet another group of disciples. And, having been filled with God, they are different people than they were before.

Much of today's Bible passages makes better sense when viewed this way. First, Jesus' summary of the Law, to love God and love neighbour is not so much a mechanical command 'Do this because I say so!' as a diagnostic test: 'if you are indeed obeying the God who lives within you, you will do your best to love God and

neighbour: that love is God in action'. The commandment to love God becomes a command to seek God, be immersed in God: to let God reveal Himself. Or again, the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 6 ??? 'The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace and so on' becomes, 'A good way of telling if you do indeed allow God free rein in your life is to see the extent to which you have *agapé* love and godly joy and God-filled peace'— in effect, if you have God in your lives you will show God, and He looks very much like love. Or the gifts of the Spirit in Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12, 'Love, and gifts of prophecy, healing, encouragement and so forth' is, rather, a way of looking at those who claim to be inspired by an indwelling God: does the God within them empower their *agapé* love: does God live in them in such a way that they simply do not function in the same way they did before they met God? God within them shows Himself as God.

To recap, today's Gospel passage is full of astonishing promises. Jesus calls us friends. Jesus has made everything known to us. Jesus chose us. Our joy can be made complete. And all of it is bound up in Jesus' command to abide in, be filled with, his *agapé* love. So it's time to look again at Jesus' command in today's Gospel reading. And to do so, I'll again use that identity of 'God is love'.

Firstly, this love that comes from God is Jesus' love. It's not love from the world or from other people. It's the Spirit of God living in us as achieved by Jesus for Jesus inspired by Jesus and pulling us back into Jesus. Living in this form of love will make us look very much like Jesus. Notice how he says, 'Abide in *my* love' (be filled with my God) and not 'Abide in "so and so's" God'.

Second, the word abide gives a sense of tenacious determination. It's a strong word. It does not mean a bland sense of 'Let's have a go at it' but, rather, it implies every ounce of our strength, every molecule of our breath, as we run the marathon of faith. It's the strength that is energised by an infinite God living in us. Jesus said, 'Abide in my love; abide in my God' 'let my God *abide* in you.'

And third, we abide in the love of Jesus, so we don't just talk about God and His love or think about God and His love or read / hear / think about God and His love but immerse ourselves in Him. We actually ask God to live in us. Jesus said, 'Abide *in* my love; abide *in* my God.'

Easter is over. Jesus has ascended to Heaven and we may be tempted to say we feel alone, orphaned in the faith, unable to function in a godly way. We are not to. Rather, we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God, the comforter, who will inspire and energise our love. As Jesus says, 'Abide in my love.'

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

In response to the New Commandment, we commit to loving God. Empower us to love You so that we become entirely identified with You.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

In response to the New Commandment, we commit to living as a Church that works to build a new heaven here on earth. Empower us to living the love of Jesus so that Church becomes entirely identified with him.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

In response to the New Commandment, we commit to building a new earth. Empower us as we care for it and mend it. In love, help us to care for the people of the earth so that everything about our planet becomes entirely identified with You.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

In response to the New Commandment, we commit to love one another as Jesus loves us. Empower us to wash one another's feet and explore every means of love. Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

In response to the New Commandment, we commit to loving the Lord. Empower us to move from living in this world and start living in the next. We pray for those whose earthly phase of being has ended and the new begun.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Come down O Love divine (please click on this link to hear the hymn)
Come down O Love divine (instrumental version)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

HYMN 4 Love one another (click on this link to hear the hymn)
Love one another (Iona community version)

The Dismissal

God the Father,
by whose love Christ was raised from the dead,
open to you who believe the gates of everlasting life.

All Amen.

God the Son,
who in bursting the grave has won a glorious victory,
give you joy as you share the Easter faith.

All Amen.

God the Holy Spirit,
whom the risen Lord breathed into his disciples,
empower you and fill you with Christ's peace.

All Amen.

And the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ.

Amen.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

All He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**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.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God our Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.