

Worship at home Sunday 28th April [Easter 5]

Welcome to this short act of worship from the Plymouth & Exeter District. We invite you to spend time with God, knowing that other people across the District are sharing this with you. Today's service has been prepared by Bev Smerdon, local preacher in the Plymouth and Devonport Circuit.

CCL 50389

***Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed, Alleluia!***

As we begin week 5 of the Easter season, this week's service focusses on the lectionary readings, which provide a masterclass in theology. Sometimes people can be put off by the word "theology", but it simply means the study of God. It is something which most Christians do all the time, through reading the bible and thinking about what it may be showing us about God, about God's action in our lives and about how we choose to live in relation to who God is. Many Christians also read other books which give further insight about God, but today we will focus on the bible.

The set reading from the Psalms today is taken from Psalm 22. This Psalm begins with the verse that Jesus quoted when he was dying on the cross: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" It is a Psalm of King David, who knew all about desperate times, and yet it continually refers to the promises of God, which leads to moments of praise. It is as if the Psalmist is reminding himself of all God is and all he can do.

Please read Psalm 22: 25-31 (*aloud if possible*)

Let's pray: Living, loving God, you know all about the difficulties and challenges of human life and you know everything about me. Forgive me for those things that would separate me from you and draw me closer to you as I come to worship you in spirit and truth today.

Reveal more about yourself to me and help me to understand more about you through our time together. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, make me hungry for more of your presence and wisdom. Feed me today through your Word: Jesus and through your word: the Bible. **Amen.**

Hymn: Singing the Faith #158
Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers,

Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers,
still and small and scarcely heard;
only those who want to listen
catch the all-important word.

Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,
through our loud and noisy day:
we can know and trust you better
when we quietly wait and pray.

Lord, you love to speak in Scripture:
words that summon from the page,
shown and taught us by your Spirit
with fresh light for every age.

5 Lord, you always speak in Jesus,
always new yet still the same;
teach us now more of our Saviour;
make our lives display his Name.

Christopher Idle (b1938)

In your own words spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to give you an open heart and mind before you read the lectionary readings:

Acts 8:26-40 and John 15: 1-8

Message: The book of Acts is a wonderfully inspiring book, recounting the beginnings of the Christian faith and the actions of the early followers of Christ but all done with a reminder that there was also persecution and challenge. Sometimes bible passages become so familiar they lose their impact. I am sure many of us have heard the story of Philip and the Eunuch since Sunday School days. So, I invite you to read it again and see if you can identify the amazing “coincidences” that are happening (*which are referred to by some people as God-incidences*) and the process the Holy Spirit uses.

[Read on after re-reading Acts 8:26-40]

The Holy Spirit will help us discern those who “have ears to hear”. Philip responds to the Holy Spirit’s prompting and “runs” to the place indicated. Philip is sufficiently steeped in the life and love of Jesus to be ready to share the “Good News” and willing to baptise the Eunuch immediately – *no time here for a confirmation class to check that he meets all the criteria*. And then, an amazing thing happens as Philip is suddenly “taken away”.

I wonder how you feel or what you think when you read about the signs and wonders and the response of the apostles in the book of Acts? Do you believe that God still performs such acts today or did these things happen just because Jesus had so recently lived, died and been resurrected?

In the book of Hebrews we read, “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today and forever.” [13:8] Therefore, it is difficult to argue that signs and wonders only happened in biblical times. I often ask myself whether I listen out sufficiently for the Holy Spirit’s promptings to be used by

God. I wonder how well you think you listen and respond?

To return to the idea of theology, if the Acts scripture gives us an example of evangelism, the reading from John’s gospel provides us with insight about what we need if we are to respond to the Holy Spirit in whatever situation we find ourselves. It is a lesson in discipleship, direct from Jesus.

Again, this is probably a familiar passage for many of us, but I suggest, once again, you invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the passage before you re-read it. Pay particular attention to anything which stands out for you.

[Read on after re-reading the passage]

I once heard someone from the Taize Community preaching on this passage and he said, we must be careful to hear the statements “if..... you will....” as a promise from Jesus, not a warning. That completely transformed my reading of this passage. I realised, I had previously imagined, Jesus with a wagging finger warning that failure meant being “cut off” from him.

I believe the “branches” he talks about in the first half of this reading is not about us as disciples but about our actions and activities. It is the unfruitful things in our lives that we need to invite God to remove. Those things which do not reflect the love of God, the sacrifice of Jesus or the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The things that we cannot hope to model without God’s help: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control [Galatians 5:22-23]

I hope, throughout the week ahead, you will continue to reflect on who God is, the workings of the Holy Spirit and what it means for us to be disciples of Jesus. And I trust, through this look at today's bible readings, God will continue to give you greater insight about the things he wants to reveal to you for your life. Amen.

[You may wish to pause in silence for a few minutes or continue with the following hymn]

**Hymn: Singing the Faith #18
Be Still and know that I am God**

Be still and know that I am God (x3)

I am the Lord that healeth thee (x3)

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust (x3)

Anonymous (based on Psalm 46:10-11)

Before the prayers for others, I invite you to respond with the words, Jesus taught his disciples, saying:

Our Father....

Let us prepare for our prayers for others with **Hymn: Singing the Faith 519**

Father, I place into Your hands

Father, I place into Your hands
The things I cannot do
Father, I place into Your hands
The times that I've been through
Father, I place into Your hands
The way that I should go
For I know I always can trust You.

Father, I place into Your hands
My friends and family
Father, I place into Your hands
The things that trouble me
Father, I place into Your hands
The person I would be
For I know I always can trust You.

Father, we love to SEEK Your face
We love to hear Your voice
Father, we love to sing Your praise
And in Your name rejoice
Father, we love to walk with You
And in Your presence rest
For we know we always can trust You.

Father, I want to be with You
And do the things You do
Father, I want to speak the words
That You are speaking too
Father, I want to love the ones
That You will draw to You
For I know that I am one with You.

Jenny Hewer (b1945)

Spend a few minutes making a list (written or verbal) of people, places and situations that you feel:

- Thankful to God for
- Concerned about
- Want help to know what to do/say
- Things that do not fit the above

Pray over the list in your own words, affirming God's power in all things and committing these situations to God.

Speak **Singing the Faith #33** to end:
O Lord, we are always in your presence,
In you we live and move and have our being
You hold us in the palm of your hand
And you lead us to your glory.

Philip Jakob

Close with a hymn of your choice or listen to a favourite piece of music/worship song before saying the words of blessing aloud:

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with me now and always. Amen.

