

Wheatthill Priory Benefice

"Jesus Lives: Follow Him"

Worship Easter 6 17 May 2020

Welcome to our worship for 17 May 2020. This week we're returning to the spiritual Communion Order of service sent out at Easter, and included in this week's mailing. Thursday 21 May is Ascension Day, and the days between Ascension and Pentecost are a time when we're encouraged to pray 'Thy Kingdom Com' praying for the church, and for people to come to grow in faith and to know Jesus in a new way.

Collect for 6th Sunday of Easter

Risen Christ,

by the lakeside you renewed your call to your disciples:

help your Church to obey your command and draw the nations to the fire of your love, to the glory of God the Father. **Amen**

Readings

Acts 17:22-31

John 14:15-21

Reflection (Jane Sedgman)

Rogation Day is next Tuesday, also the day we remember one of our most celebrated local saints, St Dunstan, who was not only Abbot of Glastonbury but subsequently became Archbishop of Canterbury in the latter part of the tenth century, a godly man, who was also influential in affairs of state. He too must have seen plague and pestilence, living at a time where life spans were short and expectations were very different and there was a far greater recognised dependency on God, although also less widespread education. Today, in a very different world, with our churches temporarily closed, our

worship home based or online in isolation, may we give thanks, to our God and remember His timelessness, his presence in creation and the promise we have, that always, he will be with us.

Rogation Sunday is traditionally when the church has asked for God's blessing on the crops and those who produce our food. This year it has a particular resonance, especially perhaps to those of us fortunate enough to live in the country, as during this largely warm and sunny late spring, we have been living through the experience of lockdown, and the natural point of refuge for many of us has been our gardens. It is easy to see this as a very British occupation, it is said we are at heart a nation of gardeners, a nod to our largely agrarian roots perhaps, and certainly gardens are places of physical work, nurture, productivity, satisfaction and it has to be acknowledged also, disappointments. You can "lose" yourself in a garden, you can strive for improvement, see what you have achieved, and it never stands still even in the depths of winter. Despite the frustrations of pests and diseases, in the end there is always something satisfying to be had and actually eating the results of your efforts is hard to beat! There is just "something" fundamental about getting a bit of dirt under your fingernails! It appeals perhaps to the primeval and the instinctive within us, so it is unsurprising that we have gardened with great enthusiasm this year, and all other things apart, engrossed in our efforts it is hard to feel lonely in a garden. They are undoubtedly therapeutic, so it is equally unsurprising that gardens are to be found in hospitals, hospices and places of remembrance. Our churchyards here in Somerset are also gardens, masquerading under another name.

Some of the most eventful moments in the history of our faith have happened in gardens. Right at the start, God walked in the morning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The focal point and place of creation where man and God enjoyed completeness, an oneness, was eventually dislocated through sin. Adam was expelled and man lost sight of God's ultimate goodness and forgiveness, the harmony replaced by fear and misunderstanding alongside the reverence and worship.

That cacophony of sin drew to a climax many centuries later in another garden, a night time garden, Gethsemane where the tortured Christ, in spiritual agony, prayed for the burden of man's sin to be lifted from him. This time love and forgiveness triumphed, not sin, and led through the shame and pain of the cross to another garden, where Mary early in the morning, carrying her herbs and balms came to anoint the body of Jesus, and joy of all joys, found not a body but the risen Lord walking in the garden.

Man needs food for the body as well for the soul and the land provides both. Rogation is a timely season to ask for God's blessing on the plants we have sown, whether they are in window boxes, pots, gardens or fields. He is a generous God and he gives us this share in his creation. It also makes us recognise we can do nothing alone, we cannot make it rain or shine and we still need the rhythms of God's earth to bring out the potential there in every tiny seed, young plant and indeed, in each of us. This strange period of lockdown, despite all the difficulties, has given us space in a frantic world to reassess, feed our souls and reconnect with God. In John we read this morning of Jesus' promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift yet to come to those first disciples, *"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."* That intrinsic circle of love between God and man, known by Adam, dislocated by sin and restored through Christ, as Paul reminds us *"The God who made the world and everything in it."*

This promise is ours, so as we ask for God's blessing on our crops in a world which feels less certain than once it did, let us give thanks too for his enduring faithfulness, forgiveness, unconditional love and the eternal nature of life in him. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession (Sally Buxton)

Heavenly Father, we pray for the Church of England at this time of trouble, that it may show forth your love in the world and in our local community: may the Church serve you as you deserve, giving and not counting the cost,

toiling and not seeking rest, labouring and not asking for any reward save that of knowing that your will is done. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, communities around the world are suffering from the impact of COVID-19 but for many this is an additional problem on top of conflict, poor government, climate change or other adversities. Help our leaders to act in the interests of the many, not the few, and to co-operate in taking steps to address the pandemic and its impact and in the longer term to tackle the inequities and indignities suffered by the vulnerable and the less affluent that it has exposed. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many volunteers who are assisting others and for the ongoing work of those who deliver our post, collect our refuse, supply our food and goods, work in our online or physical shops and maintain other essential services as well as all those providing care for others, whether in hospitals or care homes or at home. Support them and help us here in our community to look after our own vulnerable members and assist each other through the trials the pandemic is bringing. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, strengthen those who are suffering from physical or mental illness, financial problems, bereavement or loneliness in this time of trouble: help them to face and endure their difficulties with faith, courage and wisdom. Grant that their trials may bring them closer to You for You are our rock and refuge, our comfort and hope. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, you destroyed death and the devil by Your Cross and restored man to life by Your Resurrection; give rest, Lord, to the souls of the departed in Your Kingdom, where there is no pain, sorrow or suffering. We pause for a moment to think of those known to us. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Merciful father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen**