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Service for the 6th Sunday of Easter, 9th May 2021 (Rogation Sunday)

*A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today,
which includes the celebration of Holy Communion.*

CALL TO WORSHIP (from Psalm 98)

Sing a new song to the Lord! He has done wonderful things.

Sing for joy to the Lord, all the earth! Praise Him with songs and shouts of joy!

HYMN: Blessed city

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 Blessèd city, heavenly Salem,
vision dear of peace and love,
who of living stones upbuilded
art the joy of heaven above;
we, with all thy holy people,
glorious to thy glory move!

2 Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and comer-stone,
chosen of the Lord, and precious,
binding all the church in one,
holy Zion's help for ever,
and her confidence alone.

3 To this temple, where we call thee,
come, O Lord of Hosts, to-day;
with thy wonted loving-kindness
hear thy servants as they pray,
and thy fullest benediction
shed within its walls for aye.

4 Here vouchsafe to all thy servants
what they ask of thee to gain,
what they gain from thee for ever
with the blessed to retain,
and hereafter in thy glory
evermore with thee to reign.

Latin, 7th cent., tr J M Neale

PRAYER

Let us pray

God is love and we are His children. We love Him because He first loved us.

Gracious God, in you we live and move and have our being. All we are is known to you: the depths of fear, the heights of hope and the endlessness of our need for love.

Loving God we adore you.

In you is time and strength to wait for each of us to dare, to dream and to trust our hope that you are love which does not end, but ever holds us close and safe.

Loving God, we adore you.

Lord Jesus, in the stillness let us know that you love us and help us to give our love to you.

As you love all of us, help us to love each other. You have called us to be your friends; send us out to witness to you, to your power and glory.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 10: 44-48

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message. ⁴⁵ The Jewish believers who had come from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in strange tongues and praising God's greatness. Peter spoke up: ⁴⁷ "These people have received the Holy Spirit, just as we also did. Can anyone, then, stop them from being baptized with water?" ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay with them for a few days.

John 15: 9-17

⁹ I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

¹¹ "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

¹² My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. ¹³ The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give your life for them. ¹⁴ And you are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. ¹⁷ This, then, is what I command you: love one another.

HYMN: What a friend

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

3 Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus is our only refuge:
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

J M Scriven

ADDRESS: *Mrs Nancy McOnie*

It was always suggested in days gone by that a good sermon should have three parts, so it was interesting to discover that today's reading from John's gospel fitted so neatly into that description.

The three words which came into my mind were

chosen – befriended – loved

It is always a joy to preach on a passage from John's gospel because John – the beloved disciple – seems to have remembered and recorded the words of Jesus so faithfully. Our first hymn reminded us that Christ is the sure foundation of the Church: the corner-stone "chosen of the Lord and precious". Now, in today's reading, we are reminded that we also are chosen of the Lord and precious: "You did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit".

There is something very special about being chosen; being chosen to represent the school at sport, being chosen as a minister or elder of the church. Our first hymn reminded me of the first Assembly of the Church that I attended as a representative – it may have been when we were still Congregational rather than United Reformed. I was chosen to be one of the members to take the Communion elements into the church. With so many people attending, we needed quite a number of loaves and cups, and we processed from different angles of the church to meet at the Communion Table. As we made our way through the congregation, we all sang the hymn 'Blessed City, heavenly Salem': it was a memorable experience.

We are all chosen by God to love and follow Him – and we are chosen because we are loved. However, just in case we become too cosy in our faith, we are reminded that we are chosen for a purpose: that we should go and bring forth fruit.

This is no easy task for Christians today. We may not face persecution or hostility in this country, but we certainly face indifference. We need new ways of sharing our faith and making it relevant to others. Jesus was well aware of the difficulties facing His disciples in their time and the promise of His friendship was important to them. "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I call you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father."

So this friendship was a bond between them and the assurance of His support and guidance. Friendship is important for us today. This pandemic has shown us how much we rely on telephone calls or emails to keep in touch while we have not been able to visit. We have still been able to share our news with family and friends and to express our love and concern for them.

Friendship with God is also important – and we know how much we have missed our worship together. Spending time each day in prayer is a way of sharing our concerns with God and finding refreshment and guidance for the day ahead.

“Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!”

His friendship will never fail us. We should rejoice that He has called us His friends.

So we are chosen and befriended – and most of all we are loved. Because we are loved, we are also commanded to love one another. This is the only commandment Jesus gave us, unlike the long list in the Law of Moses; however, it can still be difficult to keep just this one commandment.

I wonder if Jesus could see ahead to a future time when even the Christian Church that He founded would be divided into denominations and sects. “Love one another, just as I have loved you”: how we have failed in every generation to keep this one commandment, not only as churches but as communities and nations!

How different the world would be if all people lived by this law! Revd Dr Leslie Weatherhead wrote “Love is invincible. Love is the only power in the world that can change men’s motives as they have got to be changed if our dreams are to come true”.

So as chosen, befriended and beloved children of God, may the prayer of Richard of Chichester become a daily prayer for each of us....

“Day by day, dear Lord, of Thee three things I pray,
To see Thee more clearly, to love Thee more dearly,
To follow Thee more nearly, day by day.”

Amen.

PRAYERS of intercession

Let us pray

God of love, friend to those in power,
with the local elections this week we are reminded of the privilege we have in being able to engage in democracy and vote. Whatever our political leanings, we pray for those who have retained or gained places on our local councils. May they be diligent in working for the communities they serve, passionate about improving the lives of others, and open to listening to views different from their own. Equip *all* of our political representatives with the gifts of thoughtfulness, grace and integrity.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend to those in pain,
we look at the situation unfolding in India and continue to feel despair for those who are ill and dying – and for those grieving for loved ones. We pray for the urgent supplies India needs to arrive quickly. We pray for more oxygen, medicine and vaccines. May countries who have plenty be generous in their response to the crisis. Please bring the people of India some signs of improvement and some signs of hope.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend to those who are tired,
even though we are moving out of crisis mode, we know that many of our medics and nursing staff are exhausted after a year of Covid. Help those in the NHS who are weary and tired find rest and renewed enthusiasm for their work. There are also many members of our wider communities left with long-Covid symptoms, struggling with daily life. We ask for insightful research into the after-effects of coronavirus and ways to help those who are finding it hard to return to normal life.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend to those who are struggling,
as the country opens up and some of us move back to real-life meetings or going out to work, we are aware that there are many for whom the pandemic has brought profound change to their circumstances. We think of the people who have lost their jobs and faced financial hardship as a result. We ask for resilience in the face of such difficult times, perseverance as people seek new work and try to cope with the demands of everyday life and courage to face the challenges each new day brings.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend of our friends,
thank you for the gift of friendship. Thank you for the people who bring fun and joy into our lives. Thank you for the warmth that friends bring. Thank you that we can once again see those we love – and enjoy their company. Despite the pain and struggle this year has wrought, we thank you for the friends who have helped us, stuck by us, cheered us up, listened and sympathised and helped us to cope. Bless our friends and help us to look to Jesus to learn how to deepen our friendships and live the life of love he modelled.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Amen.

HYMN: Be known to us

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

2 Here share with us, in love divine,
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine
be our immortal food.

James Montgomery

HOLY COMMUNION

A prayer of confession

Humbly and sorrowfully, we long for Your forgiveness, loving God...
for every weakening thought to which our minds have wandered;
for every thoughtless word, spoken in the heat of the moment;
for every failure of self-control;
for all the faults we cannot forget.

Help us to know Your forgiveness and acceptance. Help us to let go of the past and to live from now on for all that is good and right.

Grant, we beseech You, merciful Lord, to Your faithful people pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins and serve You with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*If you have bread and wine or juice to use as Communion elements,
please have them ready now.....*

Let us celebrate this joyful feast! People will come from east and west, from north and south, and sit at table in the Kingdom of God.

Let us hear the gracious words with which our Lord Jesus bids us come to Him, that you may draw near in full assurance of faith.

Jesus said "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Anyone who comes to me, I will never turn away."

Let us hear the story of how this sacrament began. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, He sat at supper with His disciples. While they were eating, He took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words:

"This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me."

Later, He took a cup of wine, saying:

"This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood. Drink from it, all of you, to remember me."

So now, following Jesus' example and command, we take this bread and wine, the ordinary things of the world, which Christ will make special; and as He said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

Let us pray

Loving God, we give You thanks and praise that You loved the world so much that You gave Your only Son, so that everyone who has faith in Him may not die but have eternal life.

We thank You that you offer not only bread and wine but Your very self, that we may be filled, forgiven, healed and blessed. We join with all Your people in heaven and on earth to sing Your praise.

Lord Jesus, present with us now, for all that You have done and all that You have promised, what have we to offer? Our hands are empty, our hearts are sometimes full of wrong things. We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table. But with you is mercy and the power to change us. So, as we do now what You did in an upstairs room, send

down Your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine; that they may become for us symbols of Your body – healing, forgiving and making us whole, loving and caring in the world until Your kingdom comes. **Amen.**

Jesus took bread, broke it and said:

“This is my body, it is broken for you; do this to remember me.”

Eat and remember....

Later, He took the cup of wine and said “This is the new relationship with God, made possible because of my death; take this, all of you.”

Drink and remember....

Let us pray

We thank You, Father, that You have fed us in this sacrament, united us with Christ and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, prepared for all people. To You be glory and praise.

Amen.

HYMN: Sing praise to the Lord

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 Sing praise to the Lord! Praise him in the height!
Rejoice in His word, blest angels of light.
High heavens, adore Him by whom you were made,
And worship before Him in brightness arrayed.

3 Sing praise to the Lord, all things that give sound,
Each jubilant chord, re-echo around.
Loud organs, His glory tell forth in deep tone,
And, sweet harp, the story of what he has done.

2 Sing praise to the Lord, all people on earth,
In tuneful accord, sing praise for new birth.
Praise Him who has brought you His grace from above.
Praise Him who has taught you to sing of His love.

4 Sing praise to the Lord! Thanksgiving and song
To Him be outpoured all ages along.
For love in creation, for heaven restored,
For grace of salvation, sing praise to the Lord!

H W Baker

BLESSING

May 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 with us all, evermore.

Amen.