

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion

Fifth Sunday of Easter 10 May 2020

Stephen: an Example of Trust

Opening prayer

This is a prayer
from the day when it feels impossible
to stand in another social-distanced queue.

This is a prayer
for missing friends
and loved ones
and longing for hugs
and shared laughter
where you don't have to worry
about your outbreath
and how far the droplets might travel
if the laughter is a real roar.

This is prayer that longs for
normality –
not the new normal,
but the old careless normal
of standing close to strangers
while your dogs play for a moment or two.

This is a prayer
of having to tolerate uncertainty,
of not being able to know
when it will be different
or what kind of different
the next bit will be.

This is a prayer that asks
for steadiness
in the midst of feeling at sea;
for rest
for the weariness;
for peace
for the anxieties;
for friendship
for the lonely;



Praying Hands: Albrecht Dürer 1508

for rescue
for the afflicted;
for consolation
for the grieving.

It is a prayer in need of grace.
It is a prayer in need of hope.
It is a prayer in need of the love
that is stronger than death.

Taken from a longer prayer by Jemma Allen, an Anglican priest in New Zealand and available at revgalblogpals.org

We seek forgiveness

We are often not the Easter People
that we should be,
living in the certain knowledge
of your great mercy and love.
Distracted by the world around us
we fail to hear your voice,
or hide when faith is challenged
as we wander off the path.



...Distracted by the world about us...

Lord, help me to trust in you,
to believe that no prayer goes unheeded,
no word is ever uttered in vain,
no cry for help ever ignored.
So that through every fear, and whatever anxiety,
I may rejoice in your comfort,
find strength in your love,
receive your forgiveness
know peace in your presence. Amen.

You may like to access <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekySwYo-UAs>

for the hymn: All my hope on God is founded. The words are shown as subtitles. Not sure where it was filmed but seems to be a church in the UK.

Alternative collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter.

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life:
give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen

Reading

Acts 7 55-60

The Death of Stephen.

⁵⁵ But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” ⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸ Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.



Comment (from Sheila)

Today we read Luke's brief account of Stephen's vision 'filled with the Holy Spirit...(he) saw the glory of God and Jesus' which led to his death by stoning and his final words recalling those in Luke's account of Jesus' death. Here is an example of one whose faith enabled him to believe and trust in the God who raised Jesus from death and sent the Holy Spirit, to 'receive his spirit', to take him 'home'. Stephen is enacting the words that much later the writer of John's Gospel was to portray Jesus speaking to his disciples on the night before he died. This is the gospel reading for today John 14:1-14. In the midst of the tension and uncertainty of that night Jesus says

“Do not let your hearts be troubled *or* Do not be worried or upset. Believe/trust in God, believe/trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places/rooms.”
(NRSV, NIV, Good News)

Rob Lacey, in *the street bible* retells John 14:1 as follows

“Don't look so stressed! You rely on God. So rely on *me*. Dad's place has thousands of vacancies.’

These words of assurance from Jesus about going ahead to prepare a home for all those who trust in him have encouraged Christians through the centuries facing death and have given comfort to the bereaved. Today we remember not only the witness and death of Stephen but also the many Christians who have followed the example of Stephen. In addition, we are acutely aware of the many others who have also died as a result of persecution, war and now in the course of their work during this global pandemic. It can be

hard to believe and trust God, to rely on God while enduring such suffering. This is when I can only turn to God in prayer, committing to the God who loves the world everyone and everything, and not attempt to understand it all.

We are living through a time of change – how much change is unknown – those with power (economic, political) are always reluctant to lose it – to change. In the Parish of Central Exeter, with our historic buildings, we know how the church has adapted and changed through the centuries and that faithful Christians have always worshipped and prayed both in the church buildings and at home. This will continue. We are not sure when we will be allowed to use our buildings again or what restrictions may be in place. We do not know what the city centre of Exeter will be like in the coming months and years ahead. Yet as Stephen's words and death led to the growth and development of the early church, separating from the traditions of Judaism and moving out of Jerusalem, maybe this pandemic will lead both Christians and society into new ways of relating at many different levels.

Perhaps all we can do is to trust in God – and pray for wisdom.

Richard Skinner explores the death of Stephen in this poem.



Stoning of St Stephen. One of a series of frescoes by Fra Angelico in the Niccoline Chapel, Vatican. C 1447-49

Reflections of St Stephen

Reports of my eloquence
are greatly exaggerated.
I had barely begun to speak
when they bundled me out of the city,
started with the stones.

Each missile that found its target
struck from my lips another word,
as though I were a flint
since then have fanned into fire.

Mine was a quick death. Many
have been less blessed. Which
is their day? What buildings
commemorate their witness?

Who hereafter will remember them?

Take the opportunity to listen to 'Faithful One' by Brian Doerksen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PjSO5IhI0M&list=RD7PjSO5IhI0M&start_radio=1&t=43

Intercessions *from prayers for Inclusion and Diversity by Rupert Bristow - thanks Sheila.)*

Suffering servant, healing Lord,
let us give thanks that where there is illness,
there is often a cure, courtesy of your creation;
and that when a cure is not available,
you give us other strengths and skills
to show our love for each other,
as well as the desire to search, search and search again
for the strands and signs in your world and in our minds
which will unlock the answers. Amen

God of peace, we lift to you all those who are victims of domestic violence,
who suffer in silence and simmer in resentment.
May they have the courage to resist assertively
and report or raise the alarm.
May bullies never prosper where you are Lord of all.

*Lord In your mercy
Hear our prayer.*

God of mercy, we thank you for the unifying force of prayer,
across borders, across generations.
Make prayer our delight and our guide when together,
when apart, in good times and bad.
May the light of the world be a beacon for creative solitude
as well as community cohesion throughout our lives.

*Lord In your mercy
Hear our prayer.*

Gracious Lord, create in us, we pray, a way to deal with worry
which helps us to face the big issues
without being dragged down by selfish concerns.

Give us the faith in hope to see us through
and the hope of faith to bring us home.
Loving Lord, you know the pain of death,
through the comfort of your Son and his tears at the death of others.
Bring us your insight and compassion
when we see the effects of death in ourselves and in others.
Strengthen us to give comfort, knowing that you are there
to hold our hands and strengthen our hearts.

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

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Follow the link to listen to a virtual choir singing "In resurrectione tua Christe coeli et terra laetentur! (In your resurrection, Christ, heaven and earth rejoice!) To celebrate Easter, 50 young adults from all over the world - singers and instrumentalists - share this song from their homes. Thanks to Nigel for finding this one.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-hybuXJq8&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR3oEVe0H5hcylksW2zPluBLyeiXIBvZ9Pg5UVVZYNflhEoPBm_qw6JsArc



Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen. *(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)*

Post-Communion Prayer

Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way, to rejoice in his truth and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Closing Prayers

behind the masks
across the six-foot divides
Christ arises



on this virus-infected Easter
let us come
with our tears and fears

experience the emptiness
the loss and despair
of world-wide grief

may we also see
benediction in the rising and setting sun
new life all around us

Christ is risen
the promise of steadfast love
the hope of eternal life continue

Breathe deeply
God shows no partiality
and always provides

Grace in the wilderness
in the fear-filled places
in the heaviness of grief

may we see Christ
in every face
in every place

may we breathe in
the scent of hope
the promise of new life

from this moment
be forever changed
by Love for Love

Christ is risen
Christ is risen indeed
Alleluia

go in peace:
thanks be to God. Amen

*taken from a longer prayer by Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe, pastor of Living Table United Church of Christ
in Minneapolis, USA From revgalsblogpals.org*

Night Prayer is on the next page

Night Prayer



If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.

Opening prayer:

Spirit of the Risen Christ,
As the lamps light up the evening,
Shine in our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Draw me into prayer this night, Lord,
help me imagine such a setting,
a place where I can bring my fears and worries,
a place where you will listen
and gently tend to all my needs:
a place of prayer,
a place of peace...
(*Concord Pastor*)

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, I welcome you here.

As the light fades and the evening twilight gathers
This night, each night, may I know the light of Your presence.
Thank you Father, that you have said you will never leave me or forsake me.

Where I have failed to walk in the path you have set before me,
Father, forgive.

When the world has worn me down,
Jesus, restore.

Where I have looked to my own strength rather than your strength,
Spirit, renew.

Psalm 31 *In te, Domine, speravi*

- 1 In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame:
deliver me in your righteousness.
- 2 Incline your ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,
for you are my crag and my stronghold;
for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.
- 4 Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me,
for you are my tower of strength.
- 5 Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me,
O LORD, O God of truth.

Prayer for others

I lay before God:

the situations I am anxious for you to be at work in.
the lives I long to see transformed by the experience of your salvation,
the peoples and situations that urgently require your justice, Amen.

Evening collects

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours
of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes
and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

God our Father, by whose mercy
the world turns safely into darkness and returns again to light:
we place in your hands our unfinished tasks,
our unsolved problems, and our unfulfilled hopes,
knowing that only what you bless will prosper.
To your love and protection
we commit each other and all those we love,
knowing that you alone are our sure defender,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You might like to access the website below for another virtual choir, this time from St John's Episcopal Church, Grand Haven, Michigan, USA. singing the Taizé song 'Nada te turbe' (Let nothing disturb you). The words are attributed to St Teresa of Avila 1515-1582. The lyrics are below in Spanish and English

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEJgVAy_TXQ

Text in English:

(Refrain)

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten,
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, Nothing can frighten.
God alone fill us.

Verse – Stay awake, keep watch.

There is no peace on earth.

Nothing can frighten those who make the journey and seek God.

Text in Spanish:

Nada te turbe, nada te espante;
Quien a Dios tiene, nada le falta.

Nada te turbe, nada te espante:
Sólo Dios basta.

Ya no durmáis, no durmáis,
pues que no hay paz en la tierra.
No hay a ningún cobarde aventuremos la vida la vida.