

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
11th Sunday after Trinity 23 August 2020

We are one body in Christ

The service this morning and the comments are from Sheila. Intercessions from Betsy.

Welcome everyone.

Our response to God's grace

Last Sunday evening Chris Bryan ended his reflection on Joseph with the words of Paul from Romans 11:32-36 which acknowledge the mystery that God may be merciful to all, that we cannot understand him but long to give him glory (praise, honour). Today and next week we will look at what Paul writes next in Romans 12.

Matthew's gospel will continue as a key reading for night prayer.

We begin our service this morning with the well-known hymn 'Praise my soul the King of Heaven'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

Invitation

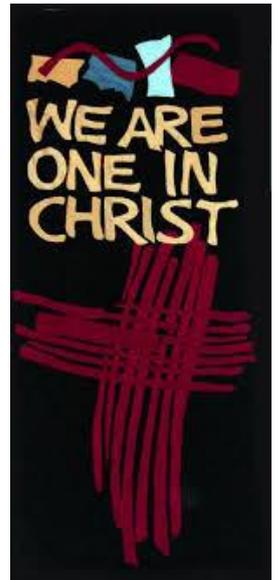
Come away from the chaos of every-day living.
Come away, you who are weary and hurting.
Come away from the pain of injustice.
Come away, you who need to be restored.
Come and find wholeness.
Come, friends, and worship.

Gathering

We are called to be people of faith in the midst of the world,
and so we mix our worship and our work,
our faith and our life.

We gather as people who live in the world and yet,
we gather as people who have been called to see the world
from a different viewpoint.

God has called us together,
God has called us to be part of a community.
God challenges us to consider questions of priority
as we engage with the world.



In this time together,
may God open our hearts, minds and eyes,
allowing us to see deeper,
helping us to live in the world
while still offering a challenge to the ways of the world.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

(Derived from Romans 12:2. On Worship Offerings. <http://worshipofferings.blogspot.ca/>)

Confession

Let us confess our sins,
not as frightened servants
but as children of the household of God.

Whenever we live like losers,
without the faith-optimism of those who have received grace upon grace;
Lord have mercy.

Whenever we serve slavishly,
forgetting the glorious liberty
of those who have been named children of God;
Christ have mercy.

Whenever we only laugh sarcastically,
mocking human faults
instead of participating in the joy of the redeemed;
Lord have mercy.

God our Saviour-Friend, by the grace of Christ Jesus
please bring us to repentance and annul our sins,
and by the infusion of your Spirit
help us to recover the joy for which we are created.

With all the enlightened souls on earth and in heaven,
we long to love you all the days of our lives,
and adore you throughout eternity.
For your name's sake. Amen!
(Bruce Prewer, d. 2018, Australian minister)

Hymn: *'God of Mercy, God of Grace'* from the Chet Valley churches, South Norfolk. Words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvn4OEq9ezU>

Reading

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (*New Revised Standard Version*)



Reflection

I wonder whether many of you have heard sermons on these first two verses and been encouraged to memorise them as I have. I wonder too if these have been given, as is the case with this reflection, without any study of the previous 11 chapters of Romans. The focus is just on living as a Christian with no consideration of the context. In order to avoid jumping to such a conclusion, I begin by quoting from the introduction to a 3-week study of Romans in BRF *Guidelines* by Andrew Lincoln. He comments on the scope of Paul's gospel in Romans and summarizes the whole book.

'Its vision of God's universal purposes embraces God's justice and love, how these are demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the plight of humanity that must have required this solution, the inauguration of a new humanity, the consummation of the whole creation, God's faithfulness to Israel in this process, and the formation of communities of love and justice that participate in God's mission in the world.' (*BRF Guidelines Sept – Dec 2015 p 91*)

This is the breadth and depth of God's love that Paul expresses in Romans and it is because of this – God's immeasurable mercy - that Paul now focusses on our response to it. As one scholar has written 'in the New Testament religion is grace and ethics is gratitude'. We respond to God's grace, i.e. show our thanksgiving, by the way we live – in our ethical standards, in our relationships. He begins with our relationship to God – our worship. In Jewish and pagan cultures worship was expressed through the sacrifice of animals and the offering of the meat and other foods. Now Paul says it is our lives which are our worship.

I recall a critique of the prayer after communion from my ordination training: after giving thanks for being fed with the sacrament, there follows the statement 'Through him (Jesus) we offer our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice'. This takes the idea of 'living sacrifice'

from Romans 12:1 but appears to give it a Greek philosophical slant with the separation of 'soul' and 'body'. This is not found in Hebrew thought. We are whole indivisible entities. We offer 'our whole selves' or 'our very lives'. This encompasses all that we think, speak, or do – our bodies are not separated from our thoughts or our spirit. God is concerned with everything. I often say 'our whole selves', but other times say 'souls and bodies' with an awareness that it is an inadequate but familiar expression.

The use of the word 'spiritual' to describe this worship may be problematic for some, as the modern idea of the 'spiritual' is of something rather nebulous. Other translations substitute 'rational' or 'reasonable' for spiritual, but this could suggest a focus on thinking more than just being. This could exclude those who have learning difficulties or brain injuries. I believe it is more helpful to remember that God is spirit and God is love and we come just as we are to worship God and offer our embodied selves. For some this will be a rigorous thoughtful approach, while others will want to jump and dance and sing – we each worship God in our own unique way. A few verses later Paul writes 'For as in one body we have many members....' and "We have gifts that differ...". The absence of communal worship that we have experienced in recent months may have led us to a better appreciation of different ways of approaching and being with God.

Our worship expresses much more than how we relate to God, as it includes how we relate to each other and the world around us. To live holy lives, our minds must be transformed and renewed. This is a gift from God, and it is one that challenges us. How do we discover God's teaching on many of today's ethical issues when the Scriptures apparently give no guidance, or when cultural and translational uncertainties make interpretation extremely difficult? This is where we need wisdom to discern the general principles expressed in scripture, but it is also where we can encounter most disagreement.

What are my blind spots? What cultural assumptions have I absorbed from my upbringing and social environment? Where do I need to change and be renewed? When am I conforming with common social attitudes rather than seeking God's way? History shows us that Christians have taken different approaches to what constitutes holiness. In the last century this includes attitudes to alcohol, cinema, pop music, Sunday observance and sex among other issues where clear boundaries of behaviour have been drawn by some communities. Yet it is not only in terms of personal behaviour that we need renewed minds, but also in our relationships with each other and with our world. May we continue to be open to the renewal of our minds by God's Holy Spirit as we seek to live holy lives.

Prayer

Servant Christ,
help us to follow you out of the dark tomb,
to share daily your resurrection life,
to be renewed daily in your image of love,
to be used daily as your new Body
in your service to the world,
Servant Christ, help us to follow you.
(India: Litany of the Disciples of Christ the Servant)

Song

'We are one body in Christ' recorded at Rhema church in Johannesburg, and includes words in other languages used in South Africa.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3RptlgdGTE>

Creed

This creed can be said by two people, or by one. The more traditional wording of the creed is woven into alternatives.

I Believe in Jesus

I believe

I awaken to

Jesus Christ

the one who walked our earth
and whose God-light shone through.

God's only son

the one whose life came from the very life of God.

Our Lord

our guide, our teacher, our friend
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
whose life was an intent of God's creative imagination,
born of the Virgin Mary
who sang love's song at his beginning and was blessed.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

rejected by the powers of the world,
was crucified,

executed by those same powers,
died,

sharing the same death of us all
and was buried.

Love had been killed.

He descended to the dead

and they thought this the end,

but on the third day

nothing could contain, bind or hold the life Jesus began.

He rose again

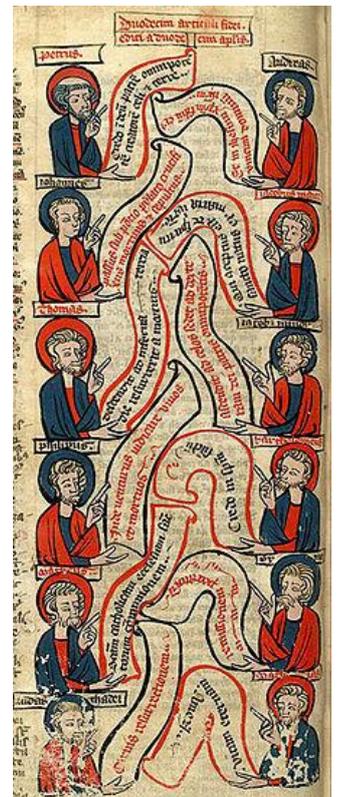
and the story continues to be believed
of renewal, transformation and life again.

I believe in and

I awaken to

Jesus.

(Adapted from website of New Kilpatrick Parish Church. <https://www.nkchurch.org.uk/>)



13th century manuscript

Intercessions (thank you Betsy)

As a nation we are not usually so uncertain of the future.
So help us not to fear it,
but to identify every sign of hope
and encourage every angel of mercy
who appears in human form.
*God, in your kindness,
hear our prayer.*

If we feel saddened by the untimely death of those we love,
or know of those facing the possibility of redundancy and restricted income,
save us from despair and the desire for revenge.
Reveal to us our better selves, our resourcefulness
and doors we have yet to open.
*God, in your kindness,
hear our prayer.*

Prevent our leaders from the presumption of high office,
liberate them to listen to the dreamers more than the schemers,
the dispossessed more than the over-possessive
so that decisions are shot through with integrity
and seasoned with wisdom as well as knowledge
*God, in your kindness,
hear our prayer.*

Help us to acknowledge our God-given gifts
and to use them for the good of others
as well of ourselves;
and to open our eyes to the goodness and giftedness
in our neighbours which we may never have seen.
*God, in your kindness,
hear our prayer.*

We ask in the name of Jesus
who has seen the goodness and giftedness in us all.
Amen.

(Adapted from intercessions by John Bell)

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

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.



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.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to access 'Brother of our flesh' words by Richard, music by Nigel, sung by the Langford singers. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP3yecvqCoE&feature=youtu.be>



Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

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

God of all creation,
in Christ we are reconciled,
and so we ask for your uniting Spirit
to help us to overcome all our divisions
that we may live in peace.

Sending out

We thank you, God,
for calling each of us to live in holiness and love.
Help us to embrace this calling with faith,
and share your love with all.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us and keep us;
the Lord make his face shine on us,
and be gracious to us;
the Lord turn his face towards us
and give us peace;
Amen

*Our closing song is 'Brother, sister, let me serve you', sung at St Botolph's church, Colchester.
Words are on the screen.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttW9oQ-yiuU>

Scroll down for Coffee Break

Coffee Break

24 August: St Bartholomew's Day

If you are Roman Catholic or Anglican you may celebrate tomorrow, August 24 as St Bartholomew's Day. So who was he? According to Matthew, Mark and Luke he was one of the twelve apostles. But he only appears in their lists and once more in Acts as a witness of the Ascension (Acts 1.13). Otherwise there is total silence – he is very much the blank face amongst the apostles. He is not mentioned at all in John's Gospel. In the three other Gospel's lists, Bartholomew is always mentioned with Philip, and because in John's Gospel when Philip is called by Jesus he finds his friend Nathanael, many commentators suggest that Nathanael is the first name to the patronymic Bartholomew: Nathanael bar Tolmai.

The calling of Phillip and Nathanael is only mentioned by John, and occurs immediately after the calling of Andrew and Peter. Possibly for John at any rate Nathanael/Bartholomew was of greater significance that we realise.

The absence of Bartholomew from any Gospel stories was soon made up for by early Christians, who developed many colourful stories about what he subsequently did. Eusebius and St Jerome tell us that Bartholomew travelled to India to preach the gospel.

In 'The Golden Legend', an 13th century collection of tales of the saints, we are told that: 'Bartholomew wears a white robe with a purple stripe, and a white cloak with four purple gems at the corners. For twenty-six years he has worn those, and they never grow old. His shoes have lasted twenty-six years. He prays a hundred times a day and a hundred times a night. His voice is like a trumpet; angels wait upon him; he is always cheerful, and knows all languages.'

However the land most frequently linked to Bartholomew is Armenia, which became the first nation to make Christianity its official religion in the year 301.

He was reputedly martyred by being skinned alive, although there are other equally gruesome stories. A relic of his body – an arm, was acquired by King Edward the Confessor who donated it to Canterbury Cathedral. This may be one explanation why there are many churches dedicated to Bartholomew over here as well as a famous London Hospital.



Bartholomew holding his flayed skin. Part of Michelangelo's Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, Rome.

Scroll down for Night Prayer

Night Prayer

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



Who do you say that I am?

Opening prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, and show us what is true.

In a world of great wealth
where many go hungry
and fortunes are won and lost
by trading in money,
come, Holy Spirit, and show us what is true.

In a world of great knowledge
where many die of ignorance
and every piece of information
has a price in the marketplace,
come, Holy Spirit, and show us what is true.

In a world of easy communication
where words leap between continents
and we expect to see a picture
to illustrate each item of the news,
come, Holy Spirit, and show us what is true.

In a Church touched by the flame of the Pentecost
moved to generous sacrifice and costly love
interpreting the will of God with new insight,
come, Holy Spirit, and show us what is true.

(Steven Orchard, English minister and author on www.prayerandverse.com)

Prayer of penitence and joy

O Lord my God!
I cannot speak to you at present
without both tears of sadness
and also overwhelming joy.

You desire constantly to be present within me;
and for that my soul is filled with gladness.
Yet despite your wonderful love,
I still so often do things which offend and upset you.

Is it possible, Lord, for a soul
which has received such blessings as you have bestowed,
still to remain so hard and stubborn?

Yes, I know it is possible,
because I so frequently rebuff your advances
and reject your blessings.
Perhaps I am the only person alive who treats you so badly.
I hope so, because I cannot bear the thought
of others offending you in the same measure.

Teach me, Lord, to sing of your mercies.
Turn my soul into a garden,
where the flowers dance in the gentle breeze,
praising you with their beauty.
Let my soul be inspired by your Holy Spirit;
let me praise you always.



(St. Teresa of Ávila, 1515-1582, Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun and reformer)

Opening thoughts

We now have the hymn: 'Blest are the pure in heart', by John Keble, sung for us by the choir of Guildford Cathedral. Words are below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpnU2auc3Rk>

1. Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode.

2. The Lord, who left the heavens
Our life and peace to bring,
To dwell in lowliness with men,
Their Pattern and their King;

3. Still to the lowly soul
He doth himself impart
And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooseth the pure in heart.

4. Lord, we thy presence seek;
May ours this blessing be;
Give us a pure and lowly heart,
A temple meet for thee.

Reading Matthew 16: 13-20

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reflection

Matthew starts this narrative by telling us where it takes place: Caesarea Phillipi. Matthew does not do this too often, so perhaps the place is significant. It might not be for us two thousand years on, but it was for the people of the time. It was the source of the River Jordan, and also a place of many temples to the deities, in particular the god Pan, god of nature. An ancient religious centre, it was further developed in the third century BC as a Hellenistic cult centre, called Paneas. After the death of Herod the Great, it was ruled by Philip II, and became his capital. He renamed it Caesarea in 14 AD in honour of the Emperor Augustus. The Bible calls it Caesarea Phillipi to distinguish it from Caesarea (Maritima) which was on the coast. So it is a place of religious significance within the Roman empire and an important power base of secular authority.

We can therefore see Jesus deliberately choosing this place as one where his identity and purpose can be explored against an alternative background.



Caesarea Philippi: remnants of the temple of Pan with Pan's grotto. A stream once gushed from the grotto, nowadays only seeping from the bedrock. The location is on the Golan Heights.

Jesus asks a strange question. Who do people say the Son of Man is? As we know, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man so he is asking 'Who do people say I am?' Why? Doesn't he know? It's hard to imagine Donald Trump, Boris Johnson or Vladimir Putin asking this question. Is this some sort of theological or faith challenge for his disciples?

Because identity matters to us, we want to be able to define ourselves rather than let others do it for us. But that is our prevailing culture. Is Jesus seeking feedback from the significant people in his life not just as a check that his message is getting through, but because he can only operate within the confines of how they understand him?

He knows full well what many people think. For many he is 'Jesus of Nazareth' and Nathanael's rhetorical question in John 1.26 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth', reveals the widespread belief that Nazareth was a dump and its inhabitants worthless.

Earlier in Matthew (13: 53-57) the locals of Nazareth know his family, and if you knew the family then you knew everything about them. 'Isn't he the carpenter's son, isn't Mary his mother? Where did he get all this (wisdom)?' No wonder he can 'do no mighty works there'.

So Jesus collects a variety of answers from the disciples, and on pressing Simon, comes the answer: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

It is only after this point that in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus starts to talk about his death and resurrection, and reveals his divine identity in the Transfiguration. His will be a kingdom that contrasts totally with the political and religious resonances of Caesarea Phillipi. Surely this can now happen because he is assured his disciples have sufficient understanding of who he is, so he can take them on to a new level of seeing and discerning his purpose.

Collect

Almighty Father,
who inspired Simon Peter,
first among the Apostles,
to confess Jesus as Messiah and Son of the Living God:

Keep your Church steadfast upon the rock of this faith,
that in unity and peace we may proclaim the one truth
and follow the one Lord, our Saviour Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Creed

We are not alone,
we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

(United Church of Canada)

Intercessions and Prayer for Unity

God of all creation
who called every being into life
who is mindful of humankind in all its diversity
who embodies us with dignity,
granting different gifts and talents to shape life in this world
we ask for your Spirit to unite us
where we face lack of understanding and disunity
in our churches, in our communities, in our countries.
And in silence we lay before you the burdens of our hearts.....



We ask for your Spirit to unite us
in the face of the conflicts, hatred and violation of life
experienced in so many regions of the earth
and in silence we bring to you the pain of the victims.....

We ask for your Spirit to unite us
wherever fear prevents us from caring for our neighbour,
from meeting people of different ethnicities, cultures
and faith communities with respect
and in silence we bring to you the brokenness of human relationships.....

God of all creation,
in Christ we are reconciled,
and so we ask for your uniting Spirit
to help us to overcome all our divisions
that we may live in peace.

(posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website. <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>)

Today's Meditation

This is a poem about St Peter by Malcolm Guite. The text is below. If you would like to hear Malcolm reading this poem, access the link. You need to scroll down to the sound bar, but I have found that does not work, and you need go below it to click on 'St Peter' at the top of the actual poem. That opens another page and then click on the arrow. It is part of a service and there is some explanation first.

<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/06/29/a-sonnet-for-st-peter/>

Peter

Impulsive master of misunderstanding
You comfort me with all your big mistakes;
Jumping the ship before you make the landing,
Placing the bet before you know the stakes.
I love the way you step out without knowing,
The way you sometimes speak before you think,
The way your broken faith is always growing,
The way he holds you even when you sink.
Born to a world that always tried to shame you,
Your shaky ego vulnerable to shame,
I love the way that Jesus chose to name you,
Before you knew how to deserve that name.
And in the end your Saviour let you prove
That each denial is undone by love.

As we come to a close we hear Phos Hilaron –(Gladsome, or joyous or gracious light), perhaps the oldest Christian hymn outside those in the Bible, and first written in a collection in the late third century. It is designed to be sung at the lighting of lamps in the evening, so is a vesper hymn, and reminds us that originally Sunday began with Saturday vespers.

It has been translated into many languages from the original Byzantine Greek, including one in English by John Keble, who we heard earlier. The words below are from the Anglican Church in Canada Book of Alternative Services.

You will hear it sung in Greek, in a way that it has been sung for centuries, with subtitles in Greek and English.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd7kcQaDbKg>

Phos Hilaron

O gracious light,
pure brightness of the ever-living Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of Life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.

Blessing

The peace of God
be over me to shelter me,
under me to uphold me,
about me to protect me,
behind me to direct me,
ever with me to save me.

The peace of all peace
be mine this night
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services: Especially Sheila for the morning's reflection, Betsy for intercessions, Richard and Nigel for music. Other material taken or developed from various websites and blogs is normally identified in the text.



The John Dory or to give it its correct name, Zeus faber, is also known as St Peter's fish, although there is no consensus about why that should be. Found throughout the world they can grow up to 65cm (just over 2ft) long and 5kg in weight. They live in coastal waters near the seabed, swim quite poorly for a fish, and tend to be solitary. Not attractive to look at with the huge dorsal fin spines, and a very thin body, it is nevertheless an extremely delicious fish to eat, though expensive.