The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Christian Aid Sunday

# Order of Service - 9th May 2021

# Welcome

A very warm welcome to you, it is great that you have tuned in wherever you are watching or listening from.

Today we welcome the start of Christian Aid Week and we celebrate love, friendship and joy within our communities and with our neighbours across the world and consider how we can reflect that through our giving and our prayer.

Let us pray.

Almighty God,

Your Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence.

Give us new hearts and constant wills

to worship and glorify you in spirit and in truth

and to serve you and our neighbours with compassion, love and generosity

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

# Hymn

All heaven declares

the glory of the risen Lord.

Who can compare with

the beauty of the Lord?

Forever he will be

the Lamb upon the throne.

I gladly bow the knee

and worship him alone.

I will proclaim

the glory of the risen Lord.

Who once was slain

to reconcile us all to God.

Forever you will be

the Lamb upon the throne.

I gladly bow the knee

and worship you alone.

#

# Prayers of Penitence

God of all creation,

we come, together or apart,

longing to meet with you

to be refreshed and restored,

by the spring of living water,

by the source of all life.

In your mercy, meet with us here.

Amen.

As we gather together, the pandemic still swirls around the world.

Mindful of all the sacrifices that have been made,

all the tears that have fallen and all that has been lost,

we can give thanks that infections are reducing,

and vaccinations proceeding, here in the UK.

We look forward to the time when we can meet together freely,

and we pray that that day will be soon.

Mindful of our privileges and wealth,

in a country which has historically benefitted from the resources and riches of other nations,

which has been strengthened by the talents and hard work of those who chose to live here,

we pray for our brothers and sisters in places where the virus is out of control,

and where the health systems are unequal to the task of caring for those who have become sick.

And what the virus has done quickly, climate change continues to do slowly:

revealing the security of the richer nations,

and the structures which keep that security in place at the expense of others,

exposing how fragile that security really is,

that there is no peace, until there is peace for all,

and no justice until there is justice for all.

Lord God, our creator and sustainer,

gather us tenderly under your wings,

we are your children and you love us,

you bring life in abundance to us all.

You are justice and peace, and you are love.

We are sorry for those times,

when in our despair, we have forgotten your love and care for us,

when in our comfort, we have taken our privileges for granted,

when in our ignorance, we have not heard the cries of the disadvantaged and oppressed.

Lord, in your mercy,

forgive us and strengthen us.

# Collect

God our redeemer,

you have delivered us from the power of darkness

and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:

grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,

so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

# 1 John 5:1-6

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

# Hymn

For the healing of the nations,

 Lord, we pray with one accord;

for a just and equal sharing

 of the things that earth affords.

To a life of love in action

 help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us Father into freedom,

 from despair your world release,

that, redeemed from war and hatred,

 all may come and go in peace.

Show us how, through care and goodness,

 fear will die and hope increase.

You, Creator God, have written

 your great name on humankind;

for our growing in your likeness,

 bring the life of Christ to mind;

that by our response and service

 earth its destiny may find.

# John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

# Homily

Last March as we went into our first lockdown many of us wondered how we were going to shop for the basic necessities. Would we be able to order our food online and would we be able to find a delivery slot? All things that caused many of us to worry despite the fact that we probably had enough food in our homes for days.

We survived, with the help of friends and neighbours and the support groups set up in our communities, but the worry of where those basic necessities come from is a daily occurrence for many across the world today.

We are approaching Christian Aid week and we will no doubt be seeing adverts on the media about the lives of people who without the support of Christian Aid, life would be very different.

Let me tell you a little about Rose. Her grandchildren live with her and she does all she can to give them a happy childhood. She remembers the time when there was plenty of food, but the climate crisis has changed this.

When we want water, the tap turns on and provides all, and more, that we need. Rose has to set out on a long and dangerous journey, every morning, to collect water for the family. She walks on an empty stomach.

Rose is old and she cannot walk very fast. When she gets home, she has no energy to do anything else.

When the rains come the relief for this journey for Rose is often short lived. There is a nearby earth dam just minutes away from her home. It should be a lifeline. But it’s not wide enough or deep enough for everyone’s needs. It runs out of water too quickly.

Imagine how dispirited Rose must feel watching the rain fall for days, only to find the dam empty just a short while later.

What’s more, the rains are much heavier than they should be, putting Rose’s community at risk of flooding.

Rose is 67 and simply won’t have the strength to fetch water from further afield for much longer, and so the cry is that ‘We need to fight this climate crisis together’.

With a reliable source of water, people like Rose would be free from long, painful journeys. They would be able to grow fresh vegetables to eat. And they would be able to protect themselves from the dangers of coronavirus. With such dire need, every last drop of water that falls in Rose’s community is precious.

Our reading tells us there is only one way to be really happy and that is to have a close relationship with Jesus all the time. Jesus loved and cared for his disciples as much as his Father loved him. We can feel that love if we remain close to Jesus and obey his commands. Happiness doesn’t depend on the situations we find ourselves in but in knowing that Jesus will never leave us, and he will always love us.

It is because we have this relationship with Jesus that we then want to love other people. We don’t have to do great things, in fact it is often in the small acts that love is shared most, for example in the listening to others, or the small act of kindness.

We can’t do great things to help people like Rose, but we can pray for the situation and we can make a monetary donation which together with the prayers and gifts of others can make a huge difference.

Jesus says ‘I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.’ Jesus is here speaking to his disciples in preparation for his parting from them. He knows that he will suffer on Good Friday and that there will be joy on the following Sunday.

This joy does not deny sorrow or suffering but co-exists with them. Jesus’ parting words to his disciples are to be an encouragement for us to abide in the love of God. He knows the disciples are going to need each other to get through this parting, just as we need others to help us through various situations.

Their love for one another and their sacrificial giving for their friends will strengthen them. It is not duty, obligation or command that will enable them to remain faithful and bear lasting fruit. It is love, friendship and joy.

Christian Aid are suggesting that love, friendship and joy is at the heart of our experience of Christian Aid Week this year. They are hoping that it is our love for one another that will inspire our generous giving. That it is in our friendship with communities that we get to know others through the stories of people like Rose that motivates us to do all we can to make a difference to the lives of others.

The joy that we participate and experience in through Christian Aid Week does not lead us away from suffering and struggling, but leads towards it. We choose to look towards the pain and see the possibilities for transformation.

This Christian Aid Week, as we choose to enter into the struggle with Rose, then may our joy be complete.

Today is Rogation Sunday, a time when traditionally we ask God’s blessing on the emerging crops. In times past, and still across the world where everything is dependent on the local harvest this was and still is vital. A failed harvest means starvation.

Rogation provides us with the opportunity to praise the creator God, giving thanks for our food and for those who produce it, but as we do that let us remember those who continue to struggle to feed or to provide water for their families.

Rose says, ‘I believe God gives me strength and helps me persevere. I pray that God will help people to help me’. Are we ready to help people like Rose?

Amen

# Florence

A woman sings a deep, joyful tune. Her song lifts the spirits of the other women on the farm. This is Florence. She is full of life, love and laughter. The women in her farming group look up to her. She’s courageous, kind – a survivor. A few years ago, her husband died, leaving her a widow. At that time, she had no water to grow crops. Her children were hungry. She had to walk for hours on a dangerous journey to collect water. ‘Life was miserable,’ she told us.Florence could easily have been defeated. But Florence is a fighter, and she shows the women in her farming group that they can be fighters, too. Next to her farm, Florence is proud to show us something remarkable – a dam, full of freshwater. It’s thanks to Christian Aid Week donations like yours that Florence and her community have built this water dam, with the help of our partner ADSE, just a short walk away from her village.

With this dam, Florence can grow tomatoes, onions and chillies on her farm. With this dam, her children can eat healthy, nutritious vegetables. It’s her source of life and joy. Florence also uses the water from the dam to keep honey bees. She sells the rich, golden honey for cash at the market. Now, Florence is reaping a good life for herself and her family. This is all thanks to generous people like you, who have helped provide a dam close to her home.‘I have been sustained by the earth dam. My life has changed. I am very happy. You can see in my face: my face is shining. I have strength and power.’ You can see Florence’s strength and power as she hauls heavy buckets to water her crops. You can see her strength and power as she digs up the fresh vegetables she has grown. You can see her strength and power as she takes climate justice into her hands. Florence is generous, and she knows other people are struggling to cope with the drought. ‘There is a village nearby – they don’t have an earth dam. They travel for a long way to come to this water point. They are suffering.’ ‘I am thankful to people who have donated to build this earth dam. I am praying God will increase their giving.’Give today and help more people like Florence stop this climate crisis. Sadly, millions of people in Kenya are desperately struggling to survive the drought. It’s so severe that it was declared a national emergency. You can help another community build a dam. Many more people will have the water they need to sustain their families. Please give generously, and help more people like Florence to thrive.

# Intercessions

Let us pray.

O God of our salvation,

you are the hope of all the ends of the Earth

and of the farthest seas.

You call to those who thirst,

to come to the waters and drink:

to those that have no money,

to come, buy and eat,

to buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

As we come before you now,

we pray for all who thirst:

who thirst for justice, for peace, for healing.

We pray for those who suffer in body, mind or spirit:

for those known to us, and for those far from our sight;

for those who seek healing and those who care for them;

for those who are dying and for those who wait with them;

for those who battle inwardly alone, known only to you.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in India,

as they struggle to secure oxygen, hospital places, and medical treatment.

Creator God,

from the tree of the garden of Eden,

to the tree in the city in Revelation,

we thank you for your vision

of creation healed.

Help us to be your agents of restoration,

tending to the beauty of the Earth,

and enabling your healing of the nations.

We pray for those in positions of power:

politicians,

those with control of the media,

those who have amassed disproportionate wealth.

Lord, may those who exercise control over others

be restrained, motivated and guided

by your wisdom, justice and mercy.

We pray for transformation

of hearts and minds,

for the stones of indifference

to become hearts of compassion,

for the stones of anxiety

to become hearts of hope.

Let justice roll down like a river,

may righteousness flow like a never-ending stream

and may the joy of creation fill the earth.

In the name of the Father, Son and Spirit,

Amen.

Great God,

Who makes the sun to rise, and opens the heavens

Hear the cry of the people

Who sow in hope for rain, but reap only despair

Hear the cry of the people

Seeking shelter from the storm, their hopes and homes submerged

Hear the cry of the people,

When creation is hitting back, with rage and resistance

Give us hope, grant us salvation,

Give us a new relationship with creation

With reverence to tend this gift from You

And say once again of the earth and all you created

It is good.

Amen.

# Hymn

Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,

in perfect harmony the man who is God.

Lord of eternity dwells in humanity,

kneels in humility and washes our feet.

*O what a mystery! Meekness and majesty.*

*Bow down and worship for this is your God.*

*This is your God.*

Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence.

Yet learns obedience to death on a cross.

Suffering to give us life, conquering through sacrifice,

and as they crucify prays, “Father, forgive.”

Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible.

Love indestructible in frailty appears.

Lord of infinity stooping so tenderly,

lifts our humanity to the heights of his throne.

# Blessing

We conclude our worship by asking for God’s blessing on ourselves, on the work of Christian Aid and upon all those who are in need in our world.

May the presence of the Creator refresh you,

may the comfort of the Son renew you,

may the inspiration of the Spirit restore you,

to be love and action even from a distance,

in our neighbourhoods, near and far,

this day and for ever more.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with you and those whom you love,

today and always.

Amen.

Thanks be to God.