



Online Worship for St Paul's URC
and South Croydon United Church

Lent 5

Led by Rev'd Martin Knight

Opening Music – **'Ostinato'** from *Suite Antique* by John Rutter
Recorded at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Kirkland, WA
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qWUCgp-LYc>

Welcome and Call to Worship

Welcome Friends, to our online worship for St Paul's URC and South Croydon United Church on this 5th Sunday of Lent.

*We gather in reverence before the wonder of life,
the wonder of this moment,
the wonder of being together, so close, yet so apart.*

*We gather in awe of the variety of creation,
in awe of how diverse humanity is,
in awe of what we can achieve together, so close, yet so apart.*

*We gather in the joyful solidarity of this community,
in joy at the care and support we share,
in joy that we share faith together, so close, and one in Christ Jesus.
As we gather to worship, what shall our greeting be?*

'What shall our greeting be?'

Sung by Oxford Methodist Circuit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk7o6JANhj4>

What shall our greeting be:
Sign of our unity?
Jesus is Lord!
May we no more defend
Barriers he died to end:
Give me your hand, my friend:
One Church, One Lord!

What is our mission here?
He makes his purpose clear:
One world, one Lord!
Spirit of truth descend,
All our confusions end:
Give me your hand, my friend:
Jesus is Lord!

He comes to save us now:
To serve him is to know
Life's true reward.
May he our lives amend,
All our betrayals end:
Give me your hand, my friend:
Jesus is Lord!

Words © Fred Pratt Green

Prayers of Praise and Confession

The Lord's Prayer

*We praise you, God of all,
you dance amongst the stars and fill the earth with light.
You bless us with spring sunshine
and refresh us with rain to water the earth.
The splash of frogs and call of woodpeckers proclaim your praise.*

*You weep in dust with the broken ones,
and walk concrete streets, one with the people.
You nourish souls and bodies and shower us with grace.
You come in the guise of friend and stranger
to challenge and change us and make us whole.
You gather us together as one holy people,
as diverse humanity, for your glory.
For these, and many other blessings,
we give you thanks and praise,
God of our lives, God in all.*

*With our good intentions gone awry,
with our sometimes narrow vision of the gospel,
with our unwillingness to take the blame or to let go of guilt,
with our skewed priorities,
God be gentle
God be gentle and make us whole.*

Let us say together the words of the Prayer that Jesus taught us;

*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.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
Forever and ever. Amen*

Isaiah 56: 3-8 – read by Lilla Haris

(NRSV)

- ³ Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,
‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people’;
and do not let the eunuch say,
‘I am just a dry tree.’
- ⁴ For thus says the LORD:

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
⁵ I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

⁸ Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

John 12: 20-33 – read by *Pat Granville-Overton*

(NRSV)

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for

eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷ 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

'Come, build the Church – not heaps of stone'

Tune: 'Ombersley', play at St James's URC, Newcastle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6upyGulNcTo>

Come, build the Church – not heaps of stone
in safe, immobile, measured walls,
but friends of Jesus, Spirit-blown,
and fit to travel where he calls.

Come, occupy with glad dissent
where death and evil fence the ground,
and pitch a Resurrection-Tent
where peace is lived, and love is found.

Exposed upon the open ground
to screams of war in East and West,
our ears will catch a deeper sound:
the weeping of the World's oppressed.

In wearied face, or frightened child,
in all they know, and need to say,
the living Christ shall stand revealed.
Come, let us follow and obey!

Words© Brian Wren

'Gathered together as one'

*God alive among us,
may we make that vital connection between your word and our lives.*

It feels like an age since we've been able to do this, but there is nothing nicer than finding a lovely little pub at the end of a long walk in the country; when your legs are aching and your thirst or hungry or both!

To be met with a warm welcome, smiley faces and a natter while you order, just makes the experience even better.

Adam and I try to look out for those that are welcoming from the outside, in the hope that it's matched inside – because, we've all had that experience of walking into a local pub or café or restaurant, only to be met with a sudden twist of heads, with unfriendly faces, looking to see who dare enter their domain. Local pubs for local people!

You can feel it – the looks, the judgement, even the low-level fear that these outsiders are different!

Even if there is no obvious physical reaction, we can guarantee that, because we're human, there will be some level of internal

judgement – ‘who are they’, ‘they’re not from round here’, ‘what is he wearing?’.

It may feel like I’m being disparaging of country folk, but this imaginary situation appears in towns and cities, libraries, churches, community groups, workplaces, on social media – basically wherever there are groups of people.

And if you add gender, sexuality, race, nationality, disability into this mix (which, of course, are all intrinsic to humans), then the judgements and stereotypes and divisions become more intense; more complicated and more painful.

The words of the prophet Isaiah that we hear this morning, run underneath John’s account of the Greeks wishing to see Jesus.

Isaiah speaks of a time when the foreigners and outcasts will be gathered to Israel, accepted on the holy mountain and joyful in God’s house of prayer.

Jesus final public teaching in John’s gospel, is delivered to a group of both Jews and Gentiles. First-century synagogues welcomed gentiles, so it is not surprising to find them in Jerusalem for Passover as well.

I do wonder though, given that we are talking about human beings, exactly how ‘welcome’ they would have been?

I'm guessing it would have been mixed and complicated, just as it is for us – some Jews would have been very welcoming and others less-so.

Isaiah talks of a time when these foreigners arrive to worship at the Holy Mountain – God's temple in Jerusalem, however, it is significant that in John, the Greeks are drawn to Jesus, not the temple.

This is typical of John's account, as he seeks to help us see where authority lies – with the temple (and our modern equivalents) or with Jesus. For John, Jesus is our example of God's way.

In our passage about the Greeks seeking Jesus, two major themes are being unpicked: the significance of Jesus death and the gathering of all God's children as one. We see this most clearly in vs. 32:

'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

We see that image of being 'lifted up' again. We saw it last week and it harks back to Moses lifting up the bronze snake in the wilderness – a symbol of both our sin and our healing.

Today, we discover part of what Jesus death means for humanity. We see what kind of world God is bringing for us; when all people are drawn together.

Just like last week, when Jesus is lifted-up onto the cross, we see before our eyes, that God created us as one people, yet we so painfully struggle and fail to live as one.

For John's Gospel, it's not enough just to come to Jesus or "want to see" him; we must have our ears unclogged and our vision corrected by the trauma that is Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection.

As Jesus explains, we cannot avoid darkness and death, we know the truth of how divided we are as people, but instead, we must trust that God will bring about life. We must choose to be people who follow the light – the Good News that we are, already, one in Christ.

This message is perhaps even more important this year, as we've all endured a time of pandemic and seemingly endless death. We have seen both, how we have come together in care and solidarity (not least in the joy of our two churches growing closer together), and we've seen how our divisions and prejudices cause terrible injustice and inequality meaning some of God's family have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

We may not be able to avoid the darkness of our division, but we can, like those foretold in Isaiah 56, cling to Jesus' promise that he will light our paths toward life – life gathered together as one.

As communities of Christ, as churches and as people, the cross stands as witness that we are gathered as Brothers and Sisters.

What might that mean for us as churches?

We have clearly learnt how to 'gather' in different ways this past year – how might we be ever more welcoming and open to each other? All crazy, unexpected surprising ideas are welcome!

As part of our Lenten journey, we grieve what our division causes, and commit ourselves again to walk together in the light of Christ, who reminds us that we are one.

Amen

'Brother, sister, let me serve you'

Sung by the Northumbria Community

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07FBSrx5Oq4>

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
we're companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too.

Words© Richard A. M. Gillard

Prayers of Care

*Creator God of all,
your prophet Isaiah described a world where we are not separated
from each other or from you.*

*In places of division,
places of conflict and war,
places of racism and sexism and anything that separates us
Let your prophet be heard.*

*Your prophet Isaiah described a world where everyone has a name
in God's house.*

*Where the tears of the nameless and voiceless billions,
the tears of those in poverty and homelessness,
the tears of all those seeking peace and wholeness
fall on dry ground,
Let your prophet be heard.*

Your prophet Isaiah described a world where all humanity shall be brought to your Holy Mountain and be joyful in your house of prayer.

*Where the ignored, with a voice of love, find no place in church,
the rejected, with creativity to share, leave after years,
the excluded, with all their gifts, never arrive
Let your prophet speak.*

Your prophet Isaiah described a world for all people, gathered in your name.

*In the lives of the hurting,
the lives of the lonely,
the lives of the broken,
Let your prophet be heard.*

*In this, your world,
in which your prophet and your Son walked and were heard,
let us be heard,
let your disciples be heard.
By our words and actions,
let your world know that we have heard your call and that we shall speak up for the wholeness and justice that is your kingdom.*

God, let your prophets be heard. Amen

Notices

- Desert Island Discs No.2, March 27th
Palm Sunday on 28th – so have Palm crosses at the ready!
St Paul's AGM after meeting.
6:30pm – Synod Area Service on Zoom
- SCUC are collecting Easter Eggs again this year, for Hestia, a charity supporting those who have faced domestic abuse, with mental health needs, or experienced Modern Slavery.
Ann will be at SCUC at 6:30pm on Wed 24th March, so feel free to drop them off them – or Sue or I can collect them and drop them off for you. If you would prefer to make a donation for us to buy some eggs to drop to Ann, please let Sue, Robert or I know.
- If restrictions are reduced in line with Government Guidance, St Paul's is aiming to reopen on the 18th April – as Covid-secure as we can be. We will be able to confirm nearer the time, with strong reminders about the importance of our risk assessment and how we need to behave to keep everyone safe!

'Community of Christ, who make the cross your own'

Tune: 'Leoni', play at St James's URC, Newcastle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsBJ2WPV8MU>

Community of Christ,
who make the Cross your own,
live out your creed and risk your life
for God alone:
the God who wears your face,
to whom all worlds belong,
whose children are of every race
and every song.

Community of Christ,
look past the Church's door
and see the refugee, the hungry,
and the poor.
Take hands with the oppressed,
the jobless in your street,
take towel and water, that you wash
your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ,
through whom the word must sound --
cry out for justice and for peace
the whole world round:
disarm the powers that war
and all that can destroy,
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish
into joy.

When menace melts away,
so shall God's will be done,
the climate of the world be peace
and Christ its Sun;
our currency be love
and kindness our law,
our food and faith be shared as one
forevermore.

Words© Shirley Erena Murray

Sending Forth & Blessing

*And now may the blessing of God,
Creator, Son and Spirit,
be upon us, and upon this church family.
May the memories we gather here give us hope for the future.
May the love that we share bring strength and joy to our hearts,
and the peace of this community be with us until we meet again.
Amen.*

Closing Music –

'One Love' by Bob Marley

Aaron Nigel Smith and the One World Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhkjw0GXYcs>

*One Love, one heart
let's get together and feel alright.*

Let's get together to light the world forever
'cos we see a time when life is brighter everyday.
Can we all learn to sing a song all as one?
Can we shine around the world like the light of the morning sun?

*One Love, one heart
let's get together and feel alright.*

We're gonna shine so bright everyday like the sun,
Like the rhythm of the drum can we love every one?
One World Chorus true, our love to you it goes on and on.
Time for us to light the world.
We do it One by One!

*One Love, one heart
let's get together and feel alright.*

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