

# 'A Deserted Place'

Sunday 7th February 2021

*with Holy Communion*



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

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## Welcome

Welcome Friends, to our online worship for St Paul's URC and South Croydon United Church, which includes Holy Communion.

Let us pause with some music, to be aware of God's presence with us as we prepare to worship:

**Opening Music –** 'Be still and know' by John L. Bell

*(provided by Naxos)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHix-ra7tME>

*Be still and know that I am God,  
and there is none beside me.*

We are called to our worship with words of approach and gratitude, from the Iona Community:

*Gather us now to this moment of blessing;  
gather us now from our places alone;  
gather us now from every distance between us;  
gather us each from our pain and our fear.*

*Gather us now in the love you have given us;  
gather us now by the grace you have shown;  
gather us now to remembrance and promise;  
gather each one as a part of the whole.*

*Open us now to this moment of gratitude;  
open us now to this time of new hope;  
open us now to the way that awaits us;  
open us now to your Light and our Joy! **Amen***

## **'Before the world began'**

*(by John L. Bell, provided by Naxos)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt6jyqkmSc8>

Before the world began one Word was there;  
grounded in God he was, rooted in care;  
by him all things were made;  
in him was love displayed;  
through him God spoke and said, 'I am for you.'

Life found in him its source; death found its end;  
light found in him its course, darkness its friend,  
for neither death nor doubt  
nor darkness can put out  
the glow of God, the shout: 'I am for you.'

The Word was in the world which from him came;  
unrecognized he was, unknown by name;  
one with all humankind,  
with the unloved aligned,  
convincing sight and mind: 'I am for you.'

All who received the Word by God were blessed;  
sisters and brothers they of earth's fond guest.  
So did the Word of Grace  
proclaim in time and space  
and with a human face, 'I am for you.'

Words© John L. Bell and Graham Maule

What stands out to you in our scripture reading?

### Jesus healing, praying and a preaching tour in Galilee

#### Mark 1: 29-39

*<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup>Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup>He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

*<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup>And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup>And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

*<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup>And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup>When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' <sup>38</sup>He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' <sup>39</sup>And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

## 'A Deserted Place'

Very often as we read or listen to a passage of scripture, one part, or verse, or character will stand out and stick in our minds.

You can ask yourself that question as you start reading – 'what stands out to me'?

This is very often how I begin to write a sermon – something will stick in my mind as I read and reflect on the passage. The Spirit sparks a direction to explore, which will speak to us.

In our reading from Mark, it is vs.35 that has stayed with me.

*<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

Whenever I approach Mark's gospel, Ched Myers commentary 'Binding the strong man', is never far from my side. He notices that throughout Mark, Jesus struggles between the public and private, moments of busy activity and snatched time-out and prayer: engagement and withdrawal.

We can see this at work today.

Just prior to our reading, Jesus was in the synagogue throwing out an unclean spirit, gaining fame which spread throughout Galilee.

As soon as they left the synagogue, Jesus escapes this celebrity in the home of Simon and Andrew.

Even there, he can't escape his ministry, as Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a fever – and without a thought, he breaks his withdrawal and heals her.

Jesus then faces a very full-on evening, with '*all who were sick or possessed with demons*' brought to him and the whole city was gathered there.

We can imagine him falling into bed late at night, drained of energy. Early in the morning, when it was still dark, he rose and went out to a deserted-place to pray.

This private withdrawal is, again, shattered – as Simon and other companions hunt him down: *‘everyone is searching for you’*.

He doesn’t tell them to ‘go away’, as any of us might be tempted to – he replies *‘let us go on to the neighbouring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do’*.

Those snatched moments to re-energize and charge batteries feel really important. Jesus clearly knew he needed them, if he was to keep up with the pace of his mission in Capernaum – especially as his fame spread.

His public role was constantly exerting pressure on his private needs.

Can you see something of this in your own life?

Moments when your desire or need to escape to a deserted-place, comes under pressure for all kinds of expectations?

Not that these expectations are necessary bad – as family, work, friends can all demand our time and energy – but they can still feel like a burden; even a joyful one!

Our modern world makes all kinds of demands on us, placing all manner of expectations that we feel we need to meet.

Some of us, but certainly our young people, will feel the pressure to have the perfect and always-amazing life that social media demands – liking the right things, looking a certain way in photos, travelling the world...

These strange and challenging times of the pandemic, demand much more of us, I think.

The idea of escaping to a deserted-place feels bizarre, given that we are in lockdown, unable to see our friends and family face to face. Isn't this already a deserted-place?

Even in our much-constricted lives at the moment, the pressures and demands are still there – perhaps with even greater weight.

Home schooling

Caring for elderly relatives

Balancing pressured finances

Trying to follow restrictions and do the right thing

Should I clap for Captain Sir Tom or the NHS?

Am I exercising enough with Joe Wicks?

Have I sorted my house from top to bottom?

Have I learnt a new language, with all this free time?

Working longer hours either at home or out in the hospital, cleaning the streets etc...

The public demands and pressure feel greater.

What might it mean for us to follow the way of Jesus?

Where is our deserted-place, where we can pray?

Do we need to hear that these places and times of withdrawal are not selfish? I hope we know that God is always with us – even in the demands and busyness, but perhaps Jesus, like us, struggled to hear God or to fully immerse himself in God's peace whilst in the fray.

Jesus repeatedly sought space to be with the one who gave him life.

Where is that space for you?

Let us all seek to follow Jesus, not only into activity and action, but also to those re-energizing spaces of prayer; those deserted-places where the Holy Spirit will fill us again, with hope and joy. Amen

## **'Listening God, you hear us'**

*(played by Ste Duckett)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8buaLAfdKjU>

Listening God, you hear us when we cannot speak,  
when despair and turmoil leave us faint and weak.  
In love you call us back to you again  
and your grace reminds us how you feel our pain.

Searching God, you find us when we go astray,  
as self-centred living takes us from your way.  
In love you seek us show us what we've lost  
and your tears remind us what forgiveness cost.

Suffering God, you lift us from our deepest grief,  
when emotion blinds us to our own belief.  
In love you touch us with your nail-torn hand  
and your wounds remind us why you understand.

*Words©Marjorie Dobson*

### **Prayers of Intercession** *(written and led by Fran Boto)*

#### *Loving God*

*we bring to you those who are challenged physically this morning,  
those who are ill with Covid-19 or with cancer or other illnesses  
awaiting surgery or treatments which have had to be delayed.  
We pray for the medical and nursing staff, paramedics and care  
staff, the vaccinators, the shop workers, the delivery workers and  
the refuse collectors. We pray that you will continue to make them  
resilient and give them energy to go on through hard and uncertain  
times.*

*We pray for those whose stomachs are knotted with worry and  
those who toss and turn in their beds with sleep evading them. We  
remember those who have been bereaved and those who fear they  
will lose a loved one. We bring to you those who have to choose*

*between heat and food and those whose businesses are precarious or who are unemployed.*

*We remember those who cannot sleep at night or who cannot get out of unsafe properties due to the cladding materials. We remember young people whose education and futures are uncertain, teachers and parents who feel fatigued and frustrated and everyone who is feeling isolated and as if their world has turned upside down. We pray that they will find some hope and light in the love and concern of others. May we be those people of light to those who are known to us.*

*God of peace we pray for troubled areas in our world where your wisdom and balm is needed. We pray for the situation in Myanmar and Russia. We pray that the heat might come out of these situations whilst wisdom, justice and fairness prevail. We remember countries of the world where battles with Covid-19 continue and the infrastructure is so fragile that the people are suffering in untold proportions. Make us generous in our responses and prevent us from having a small world view.*

*We pray for ourselves at St Paul's and South Croydon United. Creator God make us a people of light and love ever adapting to our situations, ever finding new ways to reach out to our communities to spread your message of hope. Give us the courage to step out on new paths, trusting in your guidance and listening to the Spirit.*

*Merciful God, if we do not hear at first, we pray that you will speak even louder. We pray that we will learn to rest in you and to recharge our flagging spirits with your inextinguishable energy.*

*Help us to say no, when needed and to say 'yes' but just a moment when we need to recharge in communion with you. Keep us close to you, help us to turn to you in prayer and to shy away from self-reliance. Help us to radiate the love we first received from you.*



*We pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord  
Amen.*

## **Holy Communion**

In this time of social-distancing and separation, we cannot share fully together the one loaf and the one cup, yet, just as we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, we are surrounded by each other. Therefore, in communion, we accept the invitation of Christ to remember him.

You may wish to take bread and wine at home.

You may prefer to allow the Spirit to bless you in this time of remembrance.

Be assured, you are welcome here at this meal, where heaven touches earth.

### **The Peace**

*The peace of the Lord be with you,*

**AND ALSO WITH YOU**

### **Invitation**

*'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'*

*We come to this meal in hope*

*We come to this meal in joy*

*We come, ready to receive from our host.*

*For this is a space, both a part of our lives*

*and apart from our lives,  
where God meets us  
as we share a meal that Jesus shared.*

*Here is the story of this meal:*

### **The Story**

*On the night on which he was betrayed,  
And as they were sitting at a meal,  
Jesus took a piece of bread and broke it.  
He gave it to his disciples saying,  
'This is my body. It is broken for you.  
Do this to remember me'.*

*Later, after they had eaten,  
He took a cup of wine and said,  
'This cup is the new relationship with God  
Made possible because of my death.  
Drink this all of you, to remember me.'*

*So, now we do as Jesus did  
We take simple bread and wine,  
And fill them with meaning.  
Christ seeks to make us whole.  
The table is ready and so in joy, we pray together:*

### **The Great Prayer**

*Life-giving God, source of all love,  
Your energy and creative spirit fill the earth!  
Through you we dare to hope  
For a feast in which all people will join,  
With you we dare to search  
For a new song to be sung by the whole earth,  
In you we dare to dream*

*Of the liberation which Christ has promised.*

*We rejoice in the new life that is ours through you;  
of which, this meal is a visible symbol.  
Therefore, with all your people in heaven and on earth,  
we praise you, saying the hymn of your everlasting glory:*

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD**

**GOD OF POWER AND MIGHT**

**HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY**

**HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST.**

**BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.**

**HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!**

*Risen Jesus,*

*It is not by our goodness that we are here,  
but by your gracious invitation  
with arms outstretched in welcome.*

*It is not to continue an ancient tradition  
but to be nourished by our living Lord.*

*It is not to escape the demands of the world  
but to be inspired again, by the life of Christ.*

*Spirit God, bless this meal, this simple bread and wine,  
that it might renew and strengthen us,  
with both the power and gentleness of your spirit. AMEN*

### ***The Lords' Prayer***

*We pray as the one who taught us to pray...*

*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*

## **'Lord, we come to ask your healing'**

*(by St Lawrence's Church, Chorley)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbbcjEsiwb8>

Lord we come to ask Your healing,  
teach us of love;  
all unspoken shame revealing,  
teach us of love.  
Take our selfish thoughts and actions,  
petty feuds, divisive factions,  
hear us now to you appealing,  
teach us of love

Soothe away our pain and sorrow,  
hold us in love;  
grace we cannot buy or borrow,  
hold us in love.  
Though we see but dark and danger,  
though we spurn both friend and stranger,  
though we often dread tomorrow,  
hold us in love.

When the bread is raised and broken,  
fill us with love;  
words of consecration spoken,  
fill us with love.  
As our grateful prayers continue,  
make the faith that we have in you  
more than just an empty token,  
fill us with love.

Help us live for one another,  
bind us in love;  
stranger, neighbour, father, mother -  
bind us in love.  
All are equal at your table,  
through your Spirit make us able  
to embrace as sister, brother  
bind us in love.

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## **The Sharing**

*Among friends, gathered round a table,  
Jesus **took bread, broke it** and said,  
'This is my body, broken for you.'*

*In the same way, 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 – to remember me.'*

*These are the gifts of God,  
For the people of God.*

**We share the bread of life.**

**The cup of wine pours out to us**

## **Prayer after the feast**

*We give you thanks, Source of all life,  
That you have refreshed and renewed us  
With this meal of sacrificial love.  
May this feast strengthen our faith in you  
and increase our love for one another. Amen*

## Notices

St Paul's In and Outreach Team are planning more activities to keep us all united, so everyone from both St Paul's, SCUC and beyond are welcome to a zoom Coffee Morning on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> at 11am and an evening talk on the Antarctic and Galapagos by Helen Dean on Sat 27<sup>th</sup> Feb – so keep an eye out for more details.

Thinking about time out for Prayer – our Friday evening United Prayer-Time continues and you would be most welcome to join!

## 'Lord of all hopefulness'

*(sung by Choir of St Alban's Cathedral)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8mti7VL3gg>

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
whose trust ever child-like, no cares could destroy,  
be there at our waking and give us we pray  
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith  
whose strong hands were skilled  
at the plane and the lathe,  
be there at our labours and give us we pray  
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace  
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,  
be there at our homing and give us we pray  
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm  
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,

be there at our sleeping and give us we pray  
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

*Words© Jan Struther*

### **Sending forth & Blessing**

*Blessing and laughter be yours,  
space and energy and love be yours;  
the love of a great God  
who names you  
and holds you,  
while the earth turns and the flowers grow  
this day  
this moment  
and forever. Amen*

**Closing Music –**      **'Fugue in Cmaj', BWV553, by J.S.Bach**  
*(Ulf Norberg at Hedvig Eleonora Church, Stockholm)*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB\\_b9O8TxWg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB_b9O8TxWg)