



Connection

Sunday 9th May 2021
Sixth Sunday of Easter



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.

Amen

Reading: Acts 10: 44-end

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Reading: John 15: 9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: '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.'

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Amen

Reflection



This week's reflection is by Revd Canon Georgina Byrne, Residentiary Canon at Worcester Cathedral. You can listen to the podcast at:

<https://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-worship/sermon-podcasts>

Many years ago, I led a house group for members of a church congregation looking to explore their faith a little further. One evening, we were discussing the role of faith in decision making. There was general agreement that the world would be a better place if everyone lived according to the Ten Commandments. They must have caught me on a bad day. I asked, casually, whether the Ten Commandments formed a significant part of their decision making, of their personal ethical code, and they looked a little nervous. When I asked them if they could recite them, or write them down, there was panic. I will confess that, with the benefit of twenty years hindsight, I do now wince at my own brutality.

Once we had established that none of them could recall all Ten, we re-read them from the book of Exodus and had a good discussion. One woman confidently told me, after the session had ended, that the commandment most often broken was: 'Don't work on a Sunday.' I was, genuinely, puzzled. We had, after all, just read them. But the commandment, 'Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy' – God's desire for every person to set aside time for rest, echoing the divine rest in the story of creation – had been transformed in her mind into 'Don't work on a Sunday'. She told me that she felt guilty doing the ironing and housework on a Sunday, but that this was the only day available to her. A long and interesting conversation about her life ensued.

But, with the benefit of hindsight, I am struck by the way in which the word 'commandment' is used. A prohibition, a 'don't', an order. To be fair, if you read the Ten Commandments, they do sound like a series of prohibitions and orders, but only if you read them as a list, and if you forget where they came from and who gave them to whom. The commandments are the beginnings of God's law for his chosen people. And the law is what binds God to the people in covenant. In other words, God's law is what cements the relationship between God and the people. The relationship already exists.

I'm saying all of this because when we read of Jesus' new commandment, this is the way in which we need to think about it. 'I give you a new commandment,' says Jesus. 'Love one another.'

If this is an order, then it is impossible. We cannot be ordered to love. That is not how love works. Love, that warmth of affection, kindness, good will and compassion that exists between people cannot be ordered. It emerges from the quality of the relationship we have. It can only be understood, acknowledged, and lived out.

So, perhaps a better word would be *invitation*. Jesus gives an invitation, that his disciples might live with the same appreciation of one another as equals, as friends, as he holds for them. Not so much a 'don't' then, as a 'come and see', or 'abide'.

Jesus wants his disciples to understand that he loves them in the way that God loves them. He tells them that they are not servants of a spiritual master, but his friends, gathered to him, called by him, equals with whom he has shared everything that he has heard from the father. For whom he will lay down his life. This is the relationship he wants them to understand.

Once we understand that God loves us, how God loves us, how God, in Christ, walks with us and calls us his friends, then the most natural thing in the world is for us to acknowledge this. We do this in our prayers, when we meet together and declare our faith, when we worship.



We understand that God loves us, we acknowledge this openly in our worship and prayer, but then we are invited by Jesus to live out that love. 'Love one another,' he says.

We can only truly live out the love of God in the here and now, in practical action. Go out, says Jesus, and bear fruit that will last. In the diocese of Worcester, we talk of the fruit of the kingdom in terms of love, justice, compassion and freedom: branches of practical responses to faith. Go out and bear fruit. Do it, live it, live out this love.

Jesus' commandment to love is not a 'don't' sort of commandment. Much more of an invitation to 'do' – to live as people who understand God's love, who acknowledge it in worship, and who demonstrate that relationship we have with Jesus, day by day.

Requests for Prayers



We pray for all those who are sick everywhere and for those who have asked for our prayers and for their carers: Roy and Margaret Putnam, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Wendy Dufty, Yvonne Seward, Andy Caddell and Pat Farey.

We continue to pray for: Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt.

We pray for those who are in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton and Rita Sheppy.

We pray for those who have died everywhere: For those who we know and for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time. For Margaret Sutton, Pat Hiden, Don Dufty and David Finch.

Church Services

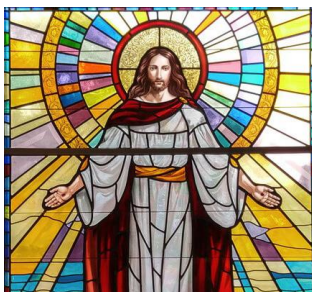
The church services this week will be at:



St Faith's, Overbury	10.30am	Rev Allison Davies
St Giles', Bredon	10.30am	Rev Catherine Lack

May Services

Date	Church	Time	Minister
16 th May	St James' Defford	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies
	St Peter's, Little Comberton	10.30am	Canon Roger Spiller
23 rd May Pentecost	United Group Service, St Mary's, Elmley Castle	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies
30 th May	Chapel of Ease, Bredon's Norton	9.00am	Reverend Catherine Lack
	St John the Baptist, Beckford	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies



News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk



Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group