

3rd May 2026. 5th Sunday of Easter.

Prayer for today: Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for Rosemary Belshaw, Will Sadler, Leo Pyle, Brenda Clark, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Kate Marris, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughhead.

Among those who have died we remember John Gibson, and also Dorothy Joyce Short, Mary Robinson, Henry Lockhart, Peter Moore and Giuseppe Sanna, whose year's mind is about this time. John Gibson's funeral will be at a date yet to be determined.

Please note: the Garden Trail takes place in a few weeks, on June 21st. Raffle tickets are on sale: please take some in Church, buy some, sell some to your friends, and raise funds for St. Helen's.

Readings:

Acts 7: 55-end

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right side of God. ⁵⁶“Look!” he said. “I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!”

⁵⁷ With a loud cry the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, ⁵⁸ threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰ He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!” He said this and died.

Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16

In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed:
deliver me in thy righteousness.

² Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily:

be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me.

³ For thou *art* my rock and my fortress;

therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

⁴ Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me:

for thou *art* my strength.

⁵ Into thine hand I commit my spirit:

thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

¹⁵ My times *are* in thy hand:

deliver me from the hand of mine enemies,
and from them that persecute me.

¹⁶ Make thy face to shine upon thy servant:
save me for thy mercies' sake.

John 14: 1-14

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.'

⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

⁶ Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

⁸ Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

⁹ Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? ¹⁰ Don't

you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

In bread we bring you , Lord, our bodies' labour.

In wine we offer you our spirits' grief.

We do not ask you, Lord, who is my neighbour?

But stand untied now, one in belief.

Oh, we have gladly heard your word, your holy word

And now in answer, Lord, our gifts we bring.

Our selfish hearts make true, our failing faith renew,

Our lives belong to you, our God and King.

The bread we offer you is blessed and broken,

And it becomes for us our spirits' food.

Over the cup we bring your word is spoken;
Make it your gift to us, your healing blood.
Take all that daily toil plants in our hearts' poor soil,
All that we take and spoil, each hopeful dream
The chances we have missed, the graces we resist,
Lord, in this eucharist, take and redeem.

Thoughts on today's readings

The 'Way of Light' is a 45 mile hike from Heavenfield, on the Miliary road near Wall, to Durham. It is not the most direct way of making the journey; it meanders from one place of interest to another, and the accompanying notes written by those who planned this route make clear their passion for the human history of our area. It makes, then, for a journey we can engage with on several levels, a journey of the imagination and of the senses and, indeed, of the spirit.

In September a group of walkers will be following this route in order to raise funds for St. Cuthbert's Hospice in Durham, where Carole works on Wednesdays. Yesterday we were making one of a series of reconnaissance walks of sections of this walk. Our leader, once again, was Steph, a nurse; she had just finished 3 nights shifts in a row at the hospice. We were not given maps; she had instructions to read, and we had to follow her lead. Our first hour involved walking in a big circle away from, and then back towards

Bishop Auckland. We had thought the walk might take three hours; in fact it was easily double that. Nevertheless it was full of interest and discoveries. I had left a rather grey and dull morning here. As we walked the sun came out and it was beautiful. The woodland was full of bluebells and other wild flowers, and our walk explored old railway lines and wagon ways, churches and great houses. We learned more about each other as we travelled together; from time to time we found signs which reassured us that we were not lost.

There was even drama as our leader stripped off to wade across a river to rescue a dog which had become trapped on the other side and restore her to her grateful owners.

There was no point worrying about what time we were going to reach the end of our walk; in fact journey's end was a really nice pub in Tudhoe. In a sense Steph, our leader for the day, was the way: hers was the energy and vision. We were not passive followers: we all helped each other find our way, but we had to be content to live in and enjoy the moment: she was the way.

Let not the words of our Gospel reading confuse or surprise us: Jesus is saying clearly: I am THE way to the Father. He and the Father are one: so how could there possibly be any other way? This journey is one we make every moment of every day when we engage with Jesus; it requires us to have trust in him. It requires us to have patience, to wait when waiting is required of us, to do and to act when the need is clear. It requires us to engage with our fellow-travellers: to support them and to be grateful for the graces and refreshment we receive from them on that journey, for surely Christ is present in each one of us.

The purpose and meaning of the journey will be lost on those who already have fixed ideas: they are not listening anyway and will plough on following the directives of their own devising, their hearts closed, in order to fulfil their personal objectives. But then what will be the point of their journey? the end of their thing is death.

This is well illustrated in our first reading. It is an account filled with a sort of irony. Here is Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, witnessing to the Jewish leaders his vision of Jesus Christ in glory. Already he is nearly there: he can see journey's end and his joy is palpable. But they, yelling about blasphemy, commit the ultimate blasphemy themselves, in literally stopping their ears to his testimony and shutting him up by killing him, ensuring they cannot hear the words of life which might have brought them redemption. But this little passage also tells us that the final word is not with human blindness, hardness of heart and violence. Among the murderers and one with them is Saul, a persecutor of Christ's witnesses. Soon Jesus will take hold of him, and on the road to Damascus replace the blindness of his religious self-righteousness with the light of faith, and make of him one of the greatest witnesses to the gospel ever born (and born again).

The disciples to whom Jesus spoke at the Last Supper would fail: these words from St. John's Gospel follow on from Jesus telling Peter that he is about to deny him three times. But ultimately they will follow Jesus; he will be the Way. Their journeys will involve suffering and even martyrdom, but they will be given all they need for the journey. The signs will reassure them that they are not lost, and many more will be blessed by them and join them, and know that on the journey of Jesus Christ there is truth and there is life -in all its fulness.