

10th May 2026. 6th Sunday of Easter

Prayer for today: 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.

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 Loughead.

Among those who have died we remember John Gibson, and also Millicent Richardson, Anna Rossiter and Frank Thompson, whose year's mind is about this time.

John Gibson's funeral will take place at Whitley Chapel on Monday 18th May at 1.30 p.m.

Our Bible Study group will resume weekly meetings, beginning on Thursday 21st May at 2.30 p.m., by kind invitation of Barbara Parker. Meetings will last an hour and a half. We will be following an 8 week course produced by the Bible Society; I have copies of the course book available. Sessions will be led by Robin Charlton, who already has experience leading this course. All are welcome.

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 17:22-31

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."

²⁹ 'Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with

justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.’

Psalms 66: 8-20

Praise our God, all peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard;
⁹ he has preserved our lives
and kept our feet from slipping.
¹⁰ For you, God, tested us;
you refined us like silver.
¹¹ You brought us into prison
and laid burdens on our backs.
¹² You let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water,
but you brought us to a place of abundance.
¹³ I will come to your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfil my vows to you –
¹⁴ vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke
when I was in trouble.
¹⁵ I will sacrifice fat animals to you
and an offering of rams;
I will offer bulls and goats.
¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.
¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth;
his praise was on my tongue.
¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;
¹⁹ but God has surely listened
and has heard my prayer.
²⁰ Praise be to God,

who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!

John 14: 15-21

¹⁵ ‘If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.’

Thoughts on today’s readings

A few days ago, Carole and I celebrated 35 years of marriage: I count my blessings every day. And I remember some of the words of the priest, Father Robin Maxted, who preached at our wedding. Love, true and real love, he said, is personal, not abstract. And so, paraphrasing St. Paul’s teaching on love in 1 Corinthians 13, he said: ‘Carole is patient and kind; Andrew keeps no score of wrongs; etc’. Love comes alive, love is real, when it is lived and when it is experienced.

St. Paul, whose speech to the city council in Athens is recounted in Acts, characterises their religion as being offered to gods who remain fundamentally unknown: how else could it be, since these gods are the product of philosophical definitions and models, or else

simple projections, based on the needs, hopes and aspirations of the worshippers, in other words little more than idolatry.

But now, he says, God, who is alive and who is the source of all created things, and who has placed in our hearts a longing to seek him, this God has sent the man through whom and in whom we may experience that knowledge of God, no longer unknown. More than this, having through this man a way whereby God is the life within us, we, like him, are no longer subject to death. Love never comes to an end; love comes from God, and God is love.

Love, then, is the lifeblood of the relationship between ourselves and God, and that love is made real, is made personal, in Jesus. But if love, any love, is real, is personal, it must be lived. If it is just a word, it is an empty thing. If the love for our spouse is simply about trying to get what we want; if we only love our children if they meet our expectations; if God is simply there to satisfy our perceived needs, then there is no real love at all, because there is no true relationship.

On the other hand, St Paul teaches, there is nothing love cannot face or cope with. Jesus taught his disciples, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments, (and if you don't you won't!). Love of his Father was at the heart of Jesus's obedience. Love of Jesus must be at the heart of our obedience to him: our following him, our learning from him.

Last night, perhaps to get away from the dismal current news, we watched the film '13 Lives', a dramatization of the incredible rescue, led by a team of British divers, of a group of 13 youngsters trapped 2.5 kilometres underground in a flooded cave in July 2018 in northern Thailand. The courage and skill of the rescuers must

have been awesome, but at the end of the rescue the local governor, who is depicted as a flawed character, pays tribute to the rescuers, saying that it was not just their skill and courage which enabled them to keep going, but their love for the boys who they saved. Love: love experienced, love lived changes us, and can change the world and has changed the world. This it seems to me is at the heart of what Jesus taught his bewildered and fearful disciples that night. Love never comes to an end: at the Last Supper Jesus was showing his disciples that his road must lead to the cross, but that he would not be leaving them alone. His death would not be the end of the divine mission, so to speak, but the beginning of its universal fulfilment. He would send the Spirit of truth, the Comforter, the Advocate, and in the Spirit he would be with them always. No longer would he be simply one man amongst the people, but alive and active in and through all who love him and keep his words. On that day, he taught, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am I you.

His witnesses have left the record of their lives throughout the generations, to inspire and encourage us. These words have given me encouragement: We know that we may come to God in prayer. St Augustine teaches that prayer is not an encounter with a choosing or judging or demanding God. Prayer is, first of all, an invitation to rest in the God who dwells in our hearts. An Italian writer prays: 'My God, let me be in this world the tangible sacrament of your Love, of your being Love; let me be your arms that press to themselves and consume in love all the loneliness of the world.' And the late Pope Francis writing two years ago, 'May Christ pour out the treasure of his light and love, so that our world...may regain the most important and necessary thing of all: its heart.'

