

# A month of Sundays – May 2021



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

# Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021

**Call to Worship:** Come apart from your busyness, leave your stresses, come and reconnect with God. Come and glorify God.

**Hymn:** Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father, there is no shadow of turning with thee; though changest not, thy compassions they fail not; as though hast been thou forever wilt be. *Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see, all I have needed thy hand hath provided, great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.*

**Prayer and Lords Prayer:** True God, true vine, strength of all our being, giver of all good gifts, healer of all that is broken: we worship you, we glorify you, we rejoice in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Gracious God we come to you aware of our failings and conscious that we have tried to live in our own strength. Forgive us and reconnect us to the vine. We have resisted the challenge of change and not trusted your truth. Forgive us and reconnect us to the vine. We have looked for quick fixes and not kingdom-shaped goals. Forgive us and reconnect us to the vine. Lord we thank you that

When our faith becomes straggly you prune it with wisdom

When our faith becomes malnourished you nurture it with grace

When our faith becomes brittle you strengthen it with truth

When our faith becomes barren, you restore it with you life-giving energy, forgiveness and love. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven .....

**Reading:** John 15v1-8: Abide in me as I abide in you.  
(v4)

## **Reflection:** (Rev Barbara Pettitt)

I have the opposite of a green finger, whatever that might be. I put it down to having lived in a street house for much of my life and not having a garden until I was 15. That's when we moved house and pretty much the only thing my dad planted was roses. That was because my mum loved roses. So she decided what went in and dad put it in. Those roses were well cared for I can tell you, but I have no idea how they did it. I remember vividly the first year when mum said they would have to be pruned and she instructed my dad on how to do that. I was shocked, I thought nothing would ever grow again. I mean he cut those roses until they were virtually sticks peeping out of the soil! But you may guess the next summer we had a glorious display of roses. Pruning can look brutal but the results speak for themselves.

I do not want to suggest that God is brutal with us because that would not be a God I believe in. But sometimes as people when we are struggling spiritually and growing it can feel a bit brutal, or at least painful. Whenever I am going through a tough time in my walk with God I think of those roses and how glorious they were after pruning. Never easy but God works with us as he prunes us.

This time last year we were in the thick of the coronavirus pandemic. We were encouraged, indeed required to stay home for a time. Harder for some than others. But how do we 'stay home', abide, with God? The purpose last year was so that the transmission of Covid would slow and the NHS would be protected. We would save lives. Jesus aim here is that we might grow in faith and 'bear fruit', which isn't possible, according to Jesus, unless we stay connected to him and each

other, like branches on a vine. During last years' lockdown we found new ways to stay connected with each other and God. Lots of people found themselves using technology in ways they never had before. Many people myself included were on a steep learning curve, as new ways presented themselves. I wonder what we have learned from those experiences? And are there as yet undiscovered ways of staying connected to Jesus?

How do you stay connected to other believers and to Jesus? Is it time to find new ways or renew ways that have fallen by the wayside in a time of pandemic?

Abide in me as I abide in you. Amen.

## **Intercessions:**

Creator God, in you we are all we need to be, through you we grow into all that we long to be. With you we bear fruit that can be used and shared and multiplied; because of you our lives are rich and blessed and fruitful; so we praise you today and every day.

Creator God, we pray for the people we know and love, those who are ill, or sad or happy, those who are lonely or overcrowded. Let them abide in you and your love.

Creator God, we pray for the people we do not know, those who are ill or dying, homeless or addicted, and for our great NHS, all those nurses and doctors and support staff who have worked so tirelessly this past year in the pandemic. Let them abide in you and your love.

Creator God we pray for your church, people local, national and international may all its peoples abide in you and your love.  
Amen.

## **Hymn:**

*You are the vine, we are the branches, keep us abiding in you.  
You are the vine, we are the branches, keep us abiding in you.*

Then we'll grow in your love, and we'll go in your name, that the  
word will surely know that you have power to heal and save.

*refrain*

**Blessing:** As we leave this time of worship, may we abide  
with God, grafted and rooted and pruned. Lord, help us to stay  
connected to one another and to you, bearing fruit wherever  
your love takes us. Amen.

# **Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

## **Call to worship**

Jesus said: 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down  
one's life for one's friends.' So, let us join together as friends,  
Jesus' friends, to worship and serve the one who, because of  
his great love, gave his all for us.

## **Opening Prayer**

Creator God, you have called us to worship you,  
chosen us to be your friends and invited us to extend that  
friendship to your people in all the world.  
May we live as Jesus lived, serve as he served, and love as he  
loved, to the glory of your name. Amen.

**Bible reading:** John 15: 9-17

## **Reflection** (Karen Le Mouton)

During my lifetime I have lived in many in different places, and it takes time to get to know people, to build up relationships (and that was without COVID-19 being on the scene!). I wonder how you feel when you develop a relationship with someone, and they finally, refer to you as their friend?

We develop many kinds of friendships: some linked to hobbies or activities that we enjoy; others may be linked with something we care passionately about; with some people we can just seem to click and feel an immediate affection for one another, for others the friendship develops slowly and deeply.

Sometimes we develop friendships with those who are quite different from us, and other friendships may develop with like-minded people.

I am still in touch with some school and college friends who I may not have seen for years, but we know what is going on in each other's lives as we continue to connect with one another in other ways. Maybe you have friendships where you had been meeting up regularly with people and are thrilled you can now do so again! Some may soon be able to go with friends to sporting events.

Some of these friendships are deep and lasting; others seem to be for a particular time in our lives, but then disappear. For many of us, we would describe our closest friends as those who have a deep mutual understanding of who we are, who are the kind of friend we can share a confidence with.

These days, through social media platforms like Facebook, people can be 'friends' with hundreds of people, or so they say. I get 'friend' requests from all sorts of people that I know nothing about and wonder why they want to add me to their list of so-called 'friends'.

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher described three kinds of friendships: firstly, there are those who develop a friendship with you because they see you as being useful to them - to make connections to others particularly as inroads into social

groups or businesses; secondly, there are those friendships which develop because they are pleasurable and enjoyable; finally, there is the kind of friendship – the best kind, that is developed solely for the sake of friendship itself.

Without doubt there are many kinds of friendship at a variety of levels. When Jesus says, *You are my friends if you do what I command*, he is not simply offering a useful or pleasurable friendship to those who carry out his bidding. Jesus is offering that kind of deep friendship which Aristotle calls the best kind. Jesus is calling us into a friendship not only with himself but also with God.

So, let us take a few moments to think about friendship with Jesus. What kind of friendship do you have with Jesus and what kind of friend is he? What kind of friend do you want him to be? And, since friendship is by its very nature, mutual, reciprocal: what kind of friend do you think Jesus wants you to be? Are you, and if not, what can you do about it? Remember there is nothing that can ever separate you from his love.

## **Hymn: STF 531 What a friend we have in Jesus**

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,  
is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged:  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness:  
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge -  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer;  
in his arms he'll take and shield thee,  
you will find a solace there.

*Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886)*

## **Prayers**

Almighty God, we pray for the needs of the people and situations that are around us, the people and situations that play on our minds and make demands of us; that frighten and confuse us; that bewilder and perplex us. We pray for people we don't understand or comprehend; for those who make us ashamed because of their words and actions. We pray for those who carry the burdens of illness and injury. We pray for those who carry the scars of prejudice and injustice. We pray for those who feel unloved, uncared for, unwanted, unknown. We pray for those who are abused, neglected and cast aside. We pray for those who see no way to change their future; who see no hope; who share no love; who know no joy.

We pray for those empty with grief and bereft without their soul mates.

Almighty God, may the love of you we know reach out to all these for whom we pray.

*Conclude your prayers with The Lord's Prayer. Amen.*

## **Blessing**

Lord Jesus, we rejoice that you have chosen us to be your friends.

Help us to be a friend to you by obeying your commands.

As we go out into your world, help us to live a life that reflects your love, by being a friend to others. Amen.

# **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

## **Call to Worship**

We sit and wait, connected in our worship yet reading alone.  
We open our hearts and minds to the possibilities of this day  
and look forward with hopefulness to the moments we spend in  
reflection and thought.

## **Opening Prayer**

May this be a day of hope, of expectation, of relishing each  
moment as a gift from you.

May this be a day of freedom, of breaking free, of loosening the  
chains that still surround us.

May this be a day of peace, of wholeness, of knowing that our  
lives are in your hands.

May this be a day of joy, of blessing, of living in your kingdom as a child of God.

Thank you that in worship we can put aside ,the uncertainties of this world and rest upon the certainties of the Kingdom, for your promises are not changeable as those of a politician might be, but immovable and eternal.

Thank you that we can bring to your feet all the hurts and fears that trouble us, and leave them there, knowing that your strength and assurance are all that we require.

Thank you that as we draw near in worship, we are transported from a world of concerns and fears, to a place where we can be at peace in your presence, find healing, wholeness and refreshment.

Speak out loud or sing The Lord's Prayer.

**Hymn** – follow in your hymn book or sing the hymn 446 in Singing the Faith I Will Offer Up My Life

Psalm 1

John 17 v 6-19

## **Reflection (Denise Johnson)**

In order to complete my training and become a Local Preacher in the Methodist Church I had to be interviewed in front of all the other preachers and give account of myself. I was nervous and was asked a question about the Ascension of Jesus – the question was, “What do you think happened on the day of Ascension?” My mind went blank, my stomach was churning and I didn't know what to say. I think I must have given the right

answer because here I am all these years later still sharing messages and leading worship.

The events of the Bible that we wrestle with and try to explain are a challenge to us and yet it is in the struggle to understand scripture that we grow and develop. To dig deeper into the meaning and relevance of the words of the Bible is not to be shied away from. In the Message version of the Bible, Psalm 1 says, “you chew on Scripture day and night.” As we chew on the words and phrases of the Bible we may feel a range of emotions – anger (how can that be true!), joy (that is uplifting), peacefulness (that is very calming) or confusion (I don’t understand that.) I would urge you to chew on Scripture, discuss it, and be honest about how some of it makes you feel, search for its relevance and find your own peace with it.

This week we have seen Ascension Day come and go. Jesus returning to be with God soon to be followed by a dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This mix of forces which touched many passionately then and still does today. I struggled to explain it all those years ago and still wrestle with it today. What are your thoughts I wonder.

However we view the Ascension of Jesus theologically what is in that story that resonates with us and speaks to us today? For me it is a story about a reunion, a coming together of what had been separated. A sign that there were no more any human limitations but yet demonstrated that God knew what our fragile human lives were like. Jesus overcame every human obstacle; even death could not hold him. The mind blowing bit is that he did it out of love, pure unbounded love for ALL humankind.

Amen.

## **Hymn**

STF 503 Love Divine

## **Prayers**

We pray for our communities - that snapshot of humanity with all ages, backgrounds , education, employment status, politics and religious viewpoint who are our neighbours in the streets where we live.

We pray for all of them; not only those we know by name and chat to through the day, but also less familiar faces about whom we know so little and pass by with just a smile. All in need of your love at this time.

Bless their homes and families and let your love and peace so shine within this community that smiles turn to conversations, and strangers become friends.

We pray this through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen

# Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May Pentecost

## Gathering words

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5.22)

## Hymn

1 Come down, O Love divine,  
seek Thou this soul of mine,  
and visit it with Thine own ardor glowing;  
O Comforter, draw near,  
within my heart appear,  
and kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,  
till earthly passions turn  
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;  
and let Thy glorious light  
shine ever on my sight,  
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

3 Let holy charity  
mine outward vesture be,  
and lowliness become mine inner clothing:  
true lowliness of heart,  
which takes the humbler part,  
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

4 And so the yearning strong,  
with which the soul will long,  
shall far outpass the pow'r of human telling;  
no soul can guess its grace,  
till he become the place  
wherein the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling.

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434)

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, send your Spirit into our hearts –  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and inward strength,  
the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness –  
that we may delight in the fear of the Lord  
and know it to be the beginning of wisdom.

We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

## **First reading: Isaiah 11.1-9**

First comment

After they have been through a difficult experience, we may sometimes hear people say, 'I don't know where my strength came from!' As Christians, of course, we do know where our strength comes from, even if we don't always recognise it at the time. Such strength is none other than the life-giving power of God's Holy Spirit.

Trusting God can produce surprisingly powerful results. think, of times when you have felt God very near, giving strength.

## **Second reading: Acts 2.1-21**

The disciples certainly needed strength on that first Pentecost Sunday. They were so scared they didn't want to go outside and even locked themselves in, lest the authorities came to kill them. All they could do was pray – and their prayer brought surprising results!

Imagine what it might have been like to be one of the disciples that day – suddenly to develop confidence, to smile again for the first time in weeks and to want to share your joy with the world. It may not be that dramatic, but we can all share God's gifts – the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... Consider how the Holy Spirit may be calling you to serve God and to share the fruit of the Spirit in the world today.

## **Prayer of confession**

Forgive us, Father,  
for our refusal to acknowledge your power.  
for our failure to show your love to those around us.  
for our unwillingness to share your gifts.

Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God forgive us and give us the courage and strength of the Holy Spirit to turn away from sin and to follow Christ.

Amen.

## **Intercessions**

Let us pray for the life and witness of the Church, for the world into which God calls us to share the gifts of his Spirit, for our families, friends and neighbours, and for all who need to know the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, help us to know your power and love today. May we be filled with your Holy Spirit to witness to your love in our daily lives.

We give you thanks, Lord Jesus, for your promise not to leave us, but to send us another comforter – the Spirit of truth. May we, rejoicing in your Spirit, have courage to share the Gospel with those around us.

Holy Spirit, give your strength and comfort to all who are suffering in our world today, through war, violence, homelessness, illness or fear. May they know the comfort and joy of your presence always with them.

Eternal God, grant us the grace to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, let us join our prayers with the whole family of God, saying, as Jesus taught us:

Third comment

In baptism (and confirmation) we share the gift of God's Holy Spirit – the breath of life that God promises to all his people. Although we don't have visible flames on our heads, God's Spirit lives in our hearts, and we are called to bring the fruit of the Spirit to our world.

Consider the gifts God has given you to build up the life of the Kingdom.

Pray (from the Gelasian Sacramentary – circa fifth century)  
God, who in generous mercy sent upon your disciples the Holy Spirit in the burning fire of your love; grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of faith; so that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

# May 30th 2021 Trinity Sunday

## Call to worship

Holy, holy, holy is our wonderful God!

Creator! Saviour! Sustainer!

Let us worship our God of infinite mystery,  
yet who is closer to us than our own breath.

**Amen.**

## Prayer

We gather in your name, O Lord,

for you are the Lord who gives strength to your people and who  
blesses them with peace.

You are the Lord who comes close to your people and draws  
them into your heart.

You are the Lord who equips your people and calls them to  
serve you in the world.

You are the Lord who loves your people and invites them into  
the fellowship of the Holy Trinity.

You are the Lord. We worship you.

**Amen.**

God of the Living Word,

we praise you for the gift of Scripture –

for the truths it invites us to embrace;

for the questions that echo our own;

for the conversations that puzzle and enlighten us;

for the encounters that inspire and inform us;

for the certainty, the mystery, the grace.

We praise you, today and always.

**Amen.**

## Reading

John 3:1-17

### **Reflection** Carolyn Hothersall

God has a wonderful ability to change people who might otherwise be considered to be out of reach. It took Nicodemus a while to come out from the darkness, but God was patient. Nicodemus, despite being one of the Pharisees who knew the scriptures thoroughly, really wanted to learn. He received far more from that night-time encounter with Jesus than he had bargained for. He came away with a whole new understanding of God and himself. He had gone, perhaps hoping for simple answers, but Jesus explained that only those born of water and the Spirit can see the kingdom of God. Jesus' response shows we cannot control the work of the Holy Spirit, who works in ways we cannot predict or understand. This left Nicodemus confused and questioning, but the answers Jesus had given began to work on him and he was transformed. Nicodemus was next seen at Jesus' trial, raising questions of justice, and later joining Joseph of Arimathea asking for the body of Jesus. They were risky moves, but he was beginning to change.

When we hunger for God enough to take risks, God responds in ways we too might not understand all at once. We struggle to understand the mystery of the concept of the Trinity: God, three in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But we know this: God sent his Son into the world that all who believe in him shall have everlasting life. And that by being born again of the Holy Spirit, having our lives transformed, we will see the kingdom of God.

*Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;  
love which commands, enables and obeys;  
you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating  
one vast increasing harmony of praise.*

*We ask you now, complete your image in us;  
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.  
May love in us, seek love and serve love's purpose,  
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.*

*(Alan Gaunt STF3)*

## **Prayer**

We recognize we are often caught up in so much busyness that we don't always make time to meet you in simplicity and stillness. We make space for our prayers for your world.

Thinking about the news which has filled our headlines, we pray for those people we have seen on our screens or read about this week, and we hold them in your love.

We know so many who are struggling with health, big decisions, crises or major changes in life. We know you care for them more deeply than we do, but we show our concern as we name them before you in quiet trust.

There are many things which we have on our minds, things we may not have shared with anyone else. But you understand us and want only the best for us. We pray to you in the honesty of our hearts.

We ask that you will take each of our prayers and answer them in your own time and in your own way, giving us expectant and trustful hearts.

**Amen**

## **Blessing**

Wonderful God,  
help us to keep adventuring with you.  
May we allow ourselves to be filled  
with visions of your awesomeness,  
and may we know your presence  
closer to us than our own breathing.  
Thank you for creating us,  
for being visible to us in Jesus,  
and for inspiring and empowering us  
with your interweaving Spirit.  
**Amen.**