

# A Month of Sundays

## May 2024



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

# Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024

## Call to worship

Come into God's presence.  
Leave behind worries. Leave behind cares.  
Leave behind prejudice and preference.  
Come to God, who accepts all,  
who receives all and who loves all.  
Come and worship our surprising God.

## Bible reading: Acts 10:44-48

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." <sup>48</sup> So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

## Hymn Stf 659: As dawn awakes another day

- 1 As dawn awakes another day,  
the working sphere rolls into view,  
and all attention centres on  
the many tasks we have to do.
- 2 Distracted by demands of time,  
and squeezed by pressures, deadlines, needs,  
there's scarcely any space or thought  
for you from whom all life proceeds.
- 3 You challenge some to leave their nets  
and follow unfamiliar ways,  
but most are called to live their faith  
in humdrum tasks of working days.

4 Affirm us, Lord, as we employ  
our hands and minds in every place,  
let worship flow through busyness,  
responding to your love and grace.

5 Your patience is our endless hope,  
your Spirit present to inspire,  
the freedom to explore your truth,  
your loving service our desire.

Clare Stainsby (b. 1959)

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Words: © Clare Stainsby

## Prayer of praise

We thank you, Lord, that if we are truly open to you,  
you fill us with your spirit.

You surprise us with your joy and power.

We are ready to accept your challenge,  
and to live our lives open to you,  
with hearts full of praise and thanksgiving.

**Amen.**

## Reflection

How do we react when we experience culture shock? A church leader writes: Many years ago, I visited the Taizé Community for the first time. I had longed to go there because my daughter had been with a school group and had found it to be beautiful.

My husband and I found ourselves passing near Taizé on a camping trip and we decided to call in. My reaction surprised me. I saw the crowds of young people milling around and suddenly had cold feet. Everyone seemed to be *very* young, *very* loud, and loud in different languages too. Like Peter in the crowd, I was surprised and couldn't imagine what we could have in common. I was too anxious even to get out of the car – especially as my husband did go and look and told me I would hate it! We went back again that evening, and the beauty and joy of the worship overwhelmed me. I discovered, as we worshipped together, what we did have in common. God and Taizé and the young people surprised me. We were united by the Holy Spirit in praise of our God.

What were Peter's intentions as he began to preach? Perhaps he imagined that only Jewish followers would be there. He went with people like himself, but he encountered a melting pot of Jews and Gentiles, a shock to his system. He had to re-think his perspective, questioning pre-conceptions and concluding that all were welcome within the love of God. This is what happens when the love of God cascades down, first to individuals such as Peter, and to you and me; then to those we meet, even though they seemed at first to be unlikely companions in the faith.

In recent years, some churches have experienced divisions (e.g. over forms of worship, or same-sex relationships) that have torn apart congregations. Some have reacted by closing themselves off from those with whom they disagree. Is this the right thing to do? Perhaps we are called, like Peter, to reassess our welcome towards those whom we perceive as different. If we believe that God's love is unconditional, and we seek to reflect that love in the way we worship and include others, then we shouldn't be surprised by God's grace. Peter's acceptance was the beginning of something great happening. By baptism a new community was born, and by sharing fellowship and hospitality, fruit began to grow. And the jolt of this discovery propelled Peter into a deeper relationship with the God he served, through the uniting power of the Holy Spirit. May we be like Peter: open to being surprised by God.

## **Prayer of confession**

Lord God, sometimes even though the evidence of you is staring us in the face, battering our eardrums, we still deliberately close our minds.

**Forgive us, and challenge us, good Lord.**

We come into your presence, sometimes we question whether others are accepted by you, and whether we are ourselves.

We might have too little self-esteem, or too much self-importance.

**Forgive us, and challenge us, good Lord.**

Sometimes we just don't want to walk in your light.

We see what we want to see, not what you would have us see.

We block out what is right before our eyes.

Our hearts are ice and we don't feel the all-consuming heat of your spirit.

**Forgive us, and challenge us, good Lord.**

**Amen.**

## **Say the Lord's Prayer**

### **A sending out prayer**

Loving God, thank you for sending Jesus to show us your love. Help us to make new friends and comfort those who are lonely. Show us that, although we are all different, we are all loved by you. Surprise us with your love in this coming week.

**Amen.**

# Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2024

## Call to worship

Generous God,  
we thank you for the good gifts we receive from you:  
for skills and abilities, for opportunities to serve.  
We ask for the gift of discernment  
that we may know our own gifts  
and recognise the potential in others.  
**Amen.**

## Bible reading: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup> and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup> He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”  
<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

<sup>23</sup> So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” <sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

## Reflection

One day a church member approached the pastor and began to speak: ‘God has told me...’. The pastor listened patiently and then replied, ‘Well, that’s very interesting, and when I feel that God is telling me the same, perhaps we can move forward’. Stories like that are amusing, but they have a serious undertone. It’s not always easy to discern the way

we should go, either in daily life or in church circles – and we go it alone at our peril. Most of us will have experienced enthusiastic colleagues who put forward ideas without properly considering whether they are feasible or desirable. Such folk may need a kindly mentor to draw them aside and point out some pitfalls and alternatives.

In the reading from Acts, the disciples seemed to understand the need for collaboration between people and God. No doubt they had observed and spoken to likely candidates before short-listing Joseph and Matthias, and before involving God in prayer and trusting in the process of drawing lots.

How do we respond if we feel that God might be calling us to something new (in church or in the world)?

If our call is to a formal, recognised form of ministry, lay or ordained, there is almost certainly a recognised process of discernment to go with it. (And selection...and training...and...) Such processes give the assurance of the church's confidence and protection. The sense of calling is not ours alone; it belongs to the church as a whole.

Of course, not everyone is called to ordained or authorised ministry. However, everyone **is** called to serve God, the community of believers, and their neighbour. If we are not sure what our calling is, a first step might be to assess our gifts and talents, and to ask what those around us see in us. Gifts of friendship, welcome, hospitality, artistic ability, computer skills (to name just a few) are just as important and necessary as those of a preacher.

In the first place, Matthias and Joseph were willing to be called by God. Then they were prepared to participate in the selection process. Finally, they were obedient to the call of the Church and accepted the roles that were assigned to them. By the power of the Spirit, may we be able to assess our skills and talents and discern God's call. May we have the grace to seek the counsel of others. And may we joyfully accept our calling, whatever that may be.

## **Hymn StF 124: For the fruits of all creation**

1 For the fruits of all creation,  
thanks be to God ;  
for the gifts to every nation,  
thanks be to God ;  
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,  
silent growth while we are sleeping,  
future needs in earth's safe-keeping,  
thanks be to God.

2 In the just reward of labour,  
God's will is done ;  
in the help we give our neighbour,  
God's will is done ;  
in our world-wide task of caring  
for the hungry and despairing,  
in the harvests we are sharing,  
God's will is done.

3 For the harvests of the Spirit,  
thanks be to God ;  
for the good we all inherit,  
thanks be to God ;  
for the wonders that astound us,  
for the truths that still confound us,  
most of all, that love has found us,  
thanks be to God.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

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## Prayers of intercession

The blossoms on the trees and parks filled with plants and flowers at this time of the year remind us of the wonders of the natural world. But we are well aware of the difficulties facing our planet. The issues around climate change can feel overwhelming but we pray that the church has a voice in the debate and that we face up to our personal responsibilities.

Lord, in a world challenged by the climate crisis,  
**let your light shine.**



In uncertain times we thank you Lord for the relationships and friendships that have carried us through: for those who have made us laugh, for those who have listened, for those who have stood by us. Thank you for the love, care and attention of others. Help us to learn to pray as Jesus did. As we move through this week and encounter our friends help us to pray for their needs and that they would know your peace in their lives.

Lord, in all of our lives and friendships,  
**let your light shine.**

## **Say the Lord's Prayer**

### **A sending out prayer**

Lord, help us to know ourselves better and to reflect on your call to us. Give us grace to use our gifts to honour you and to serve others. Help us to work together for the good of all.  
**Amen.**

# Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2024

## Pentecost

### Call to worship

Be prepared to be excited and enthused.  
Be ready to dream dreams and share hopes.  
Be willing to welcome others.  
Be excited to be challenged.  
Let us enable ourselves to receive God's Spirit afresh

### Hymn Stf 353: Jesus is Lord!

- 1 Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,  
for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made.  
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;  
sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord!  
*Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!*  
*Praise him with alleluias, for Jesus is Lord!*
- 2 Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal  
in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.  
Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding —  
yet gave his life a ransom, thus setting us free.
- 3 Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,  
from death he rose; and all his foes shall own his name.  
Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit  
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

David John Mansell (b. 1936)

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### A prayer of adoration

Powerful God, we hear so many languages around us,  
we meet people with such very different lives from our own.  
But your Spirit transcends our languages and our differences.  
It calls us out to worship you.

With the blessing of your Spirit, we can be one with all,  
going forward in your power, serving you as you deserve.  
**Amen.**

## **Say the Lord's Prayer**

### **Bible reading: Acts 2:1-21**

#### **The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost**

**2** When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

**5** Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

**13** Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

#### **Peter Addresses the Crowd**

**14** Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! **16** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

**17** "In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
<sup>19</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
<sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
<sup>21</sup> And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

## Reflection

I have often been on pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Anne d'Auray in Brittany, France. It's a very uplifting experience to be with hundreds of other Christians walking in torch-lit processions and worshipping God together. My French is fairly good, but many of the hymns sung are in Breton. I can manage 'hello' or 'cheers' in that language, but not much else. On one occasion, I recognised the tune to one of the hymns, if not the words, so I thought I would join in with the words I did know. And so it was that I was belting out 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night' on a balmy evening in July. Nobody seemed to mind. It's easy to let ourselves be intimidated when we are in a strange situation and things don't always go according to plan. Sometimes we can be paralysed by the fear of the different or the unknown and this can prevent us from welcoming others.

On another occasion, on the same pilgrimage, my husband and I were walking alongside a French nun. She seemed to be aglow with the spiritual experience and turned to us and smiled. My husband said to her, in French, that it was so good to be there. She replied to him, also in French, clutching her hands to

her chest, and said (as he thought), 'Yes, it's my liver'. My husband then told me that the poor woman was clearly there because she was ill. I told him that she was saying that 'the faith' had brought us together. There is a huge difference in French between 'la foie' (the liver) and 'le foi' (the faith) even though they sound very similar! We all laughed about the misunderstanding, and this seemed to bring us even closer together during that brief encounter. The importance of this story for me is that it was worth taking a risk to reach out, even though temporary confusion and misunderstanding was the initial result.

The disciples were confused by Pentecost; they encountered people they had not met before, and there was a degree of misunderstanding – 'they are drunk'. They needed to readjust their thinking and realise that their faith journey was taking them in a new direction. Peter began this journey by referring to the Scripture he knew about Spirit-given dreams and visions. By enlarging God's kingdom, this prophecy was becoming reality.

How about us? Are we willing to step out in faith to welcome others, even if we experience misunderstanding, embarrassment or the challenge of change? Are we able to dream dreams and recognise visions for our own worshipping community and neighbourhood? Where will we begin?

## **Prayers of intercession**

God of love, we pray for the poor in spirit.

With so many people experiencing mental health issues we think of those we know who are struggling. We bring to mind family members, friends, neighbours and people in our congregations. Help us to be compassionate listeners and good friends to people who need us. We also think of the steep rise in teenage anxiety and issues such as

anorexia; please help families trying to deal with young people who are suffering. Give the agencies and professionals working in mental health good judgement as they work with their patients.

May those who face the darkness  
**be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.**

God of love, we pray for the peacemakers.  
On this Pentecost Sunday thank you for the work of your Spirit bringing hope, joy and peace to us and to your world. On this Pentecost Sunday renew us in our faith, remind us of the outpouring of your Spirit and help us to be the agents of hope, joy and peace in our world.

May those who sow peace in our neighbourhoods  
**be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.**

## **A sending out prayer**

Thank you, God,  
for making us all different,  
all special,  
and all loved.  
Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit  
to help us to love other people.  
Give us joy as we hope and dream about the future.  
**Amen.**

# Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2024

## A gathering prayer

Let us come to God who is Holy Trinity:  
God the Father, who creates and sustains us;  
God the Son, who saves and keeps us;  
God the Holy Spirit, who lives within us.  
Let us enter into the mystery of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## Bible readings: Isaiah 6:1-8

### Isaiah's Commission

**6** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

# Bible readings: John 3:1-17

## Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

<sup>3</sup> Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

<sup>4</sup> “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup> “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

<sup>10</sup> “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.



## Reflection

The words 'mystery' and 'revelation' are tantalising. Both imply that something is hidden with more to reveal. On receiving a letter or parcel, some tear it open to see the contents quickly. Others examine the handwriting and the postmark, sniff it or shake it, feel its thickness or speculate about who sent it or what it contains. And those who use the internet and social media will know about those tempting 'click to find out more' invitations that are not always what they seem.

On a journey of faith, some people like to know everything about God all at once, perhaps even believing that that is truly possible (it isn't). Others are content to discover a little at a time so that there is always more to look forward to.

Isaiah had a direct encounter with God through a vision. The image of a high and holy being had a profound effect on Isaiah. Isaiah perceived that he himself was far from holy, and this distressed him. But he also saw that God was a God of love and mercy. So, he was not left in his state of despair; in fact, it was the exact opposite: he was cleansed, healed and made fit for service. In the Gospel reading, Nicodemus had the privilege of seeing God face-to-face in the person of Jesus. Yet, even this wonderful revelation was not completely satisfying for him. He wanted to know more about who Jesus was, so plied him with questions that Jesus patiently answered. Both Isaiah and Nicodemus had wonderful experiences of God.

While we may not experience a vision like Isaiah's, and we certainly don't have the advantage of seeing Jesus face-to-face, thankfully God is still revealed to those who are seeking, who are prepared to ask questions. The clue is in Jesus' response to Nicodemus, and the answer involves the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes today to give tantalising glimpses of God – in the Scriptures, in our worship, and also in the encounters that we have with each other. There is a story about a fictional priest called Don Camillo. In conversation with God, he suggests that ideas are like a candle in a room, lighting up the darkness for that person. Ah, says God, you are nearly right, but if more people enter the room with candles, they give more light to those near them, and eventually everything in the room is made plain.

The mystery of God – and in particular, of God as Holy Trinity – is tantalising, and all is not revealed at once. Yet, God invites us into that mystery, to explore and ask questions. There is always more to discover and look forward to.

## Prayer of praise

Thank you, Lord, that you have made each one of us unique.  
You speak to each one of us in ways we can understand  
as you guide us step by step to receive your fullness.  
We can't wait to get to know you better.  
We will thank and praise you now, and in eternity.  
**Amen.**

## Hymn StF 663: I, the Lord of sea and sky

1 I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
my hand will save.  
I, who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord.*  
*Is it I, Lord?*  
*I have heard you calling in the night.*  
*I will go, Lord,*  
*if you lead me.*  
*I will hold your people in my heart.*

2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people's pain;  
I have wept for love of them.  
They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them.  
Whom shall I send?

3 I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them.  
My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide  
till their hearts are satisfied.  
I will give my life to them.  
Whom shall I send ?

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

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## Say the Lord's Prayer

### A sending out prayer

We praise you, God the Father,  
life-giver and creator of all.  
We praise you, God the Son,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
We praise you, God the Holy Spirit,  
guide and friend.  
Surround us in your mystery,  
and be with us this coming week.  
**Amen.**