

A Month of Sundays

May 2025



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Preston Ribble Circuit

Sunday 4th May 2025

Call to worship

The Lord hears our cries.
He has restored us to life
and turned our mourning into dancing.
So let us come,
sing praises to the Lord
and give thanks to his holy name.

Bible reading

Acts 9: 10-20

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul Preaches in Damascus

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'

Hymn: **Singing the Faith 272 From heaven you came**

1 From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

3 Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 272
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Reflection

I wonder what Saul would have been thinking once he had been transformed by the encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus? He was notorious for hating the new Jesus followers. People were scared of him; they ran from him fearing for their lives. But here he was totally transformed. His perspective on Jesus had done a 180-degree turn and now he wanted to be with

the Jesus followers rather than to exterminate them. But how was he going to get other people's perspectives changed? Was that down to him or was it something only God could do?

Let's think about people and situations that we may consider to be like Saul – ones we think will never change. These might include people such as addicts or those in prison. They might be people that we know personally, such as the manager at work who is always making your life difficult and taking the credit that should be yours or the person at school who has been bullying you for the last 6 months. Or it might be a situation that is causing fear, such as awaiting a medical diagnosis or potential redundancies at work. How might God be wanting to change our perspectives on these people or situations? Are we willing to let our perspectives be changed?

Saul's life was radically transformed, and people couldn't help but notice. Ananias had a vision from God that started him on the journey to a changed perspective of Saul, and then a personal encounter with him where he clearly saw the Holy Spirit at work in Saul's life. How has encountering Jesus changed us and how we live? Can people see a difference in us? Are people changing their perspective on who Jesus is through their encounters with us, Jesus' followers? Like Ananias, we have a role to play in helping people encounter Jesus and making sense of those encounters. Who is God calling you to engage with to draw them closer to him?

A prayer of adoration

Lord, you are indeed the God of miracles.
You reveal yourself in so many different and amazing ways.
You can be there in a blinding flash from heaven,
but also in the gradual breaking of dawn
when our souls are in darkness.
We come before you now,
rejoicing in your power to light up our lives,
and to change our perspective.
We are waiting, Lord.
Amen.

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

A prayer of confession

Lord God,
we ask your forgiveness for the times
when we have hurt or denied you
by hurting or denying one of your children.
We pray that whether you come to us
in a loud, clear voice, or as a tiny whisper,
we will hear and gladly obey.
Bless us with your forgiveness and love.
Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

You alone, mighty Lord, have the power to forgive
and to help us see the error of our ways.
Thank you for the new perspective we have
when we realise we are truly forgiven.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

In this week of local elections,
we pray for those standing as candidates
and for those who will vote.
May truth be tended and integrity fed
and the way of Christ be followed.

We pray for people who feel forgotten as the attention of the
world's media moves elsewhere:
in Afghanistan, in Syria, in The Yemen, and all places of war and
hunger.
May they encounter your risen presence in the ruins of their lives
and in the rubble of their cities.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

We go from this place with perspectives changed.
May we have eyes to see you at work
in our lives and community.
May we have words of love to offer to people
society often shuns.
May we trust and obey your call on our lives.
Amen.

Sunday 11th May 2025

Call to worship

We have answered the call to life,
we gather to worship our Creator.

We gather to seek the Spirit's strength and guidance.
Come, let us worship the one who restores our souls
and leads us in right paths.

Bible reading:

Acts 9:36-43 Peter in Lydda and Joppa

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.' So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Reflection

I wonder if you've ever experienced what it feels like to be marginalised for something that is not your fault. To be considered an outsider, underappreciated, not included, all

because of your age, the colour of your skin, your gender, where you live, how your brain is wired or the accident that left you paralysed, to name but a few. The women we meet in our passage today knew exactly how that felt. They were widows – they were vulnerable and, without a husband, they had no status or voice in their society. They faced a constant struggle to have enough to eat and drink, clean clothes and a place to live and to make sure they weren't taken advantage of.

But these widows had got lucky. They lived in Joppa, the same town as Dorcas, a woman who put her faith into action and devoted her time to doing good works. Dorcas, a follower of Jesus, used what she had to provide for the widows in need. This wasn't simply giving them the clothes she had finished with, or the loaves of bread she didn't need. She gave her time to come alongside the widows. She spent time sitting with them, making clothing with them, and no doubt sharing her faith and exploring their questions about Jesus. Through her simple actions she gave these widows worth – she was empowering them to help themselves. You could see Dorcas as leading a micro-enterprise for widows from her home.

Here we have an interesting interplay between human life and eternal life. Dorcas had called the widows to experience human life again through being with them and giving them worth, yet she had also called them to eternal life through introducing them to Jesus.

Hymn STF 342: All hail the power of Jesu's name

- 1 All hail the power of Jesu's name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.
- 2 You seed of Israel's chosen race,
you ransomed of the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.
- 3 Hail him, the heir of David's line
whom David Lord did call,
the God incarnate, Man divine,
and crown him Lord of all.
- 4 Let every kindred, every tribe
on this terrestrial ball,
to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.
- 5 O that with yonder sacred throng
we at his feet may fall,
join in the everlasting song,
and crown him Lord of all!

Edward Perronet (1726–1792) *adapted by* John Rippon (1751–1836)
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 342.

Prayers of intercession

God of all nations, in faith and with trusting perseverance, we pray for those suffering as a consequence of the policies and decisions of their leaders; for those living in war zones; for those fleeing their countries; for those battling with the effects of climate change; for those left with less than they need to survive; for those whose daily lives are controlled by others.

Lord Jesus, be with them through their ups and downs,
and wipe every tear from their eyes

We pray for those who work in caring professions; those suffering from exhaustion; for those feeling demoralised; for those they aim to support and minister to; for those waiting for help and treatment; for those in the last stages of their life.

Lord Jesus, be with them through their ups and downs,
and wipe every tear from their eyes

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Dorcas, your faithful servant,
worked willingly for you and her friends.

We thank you that you called her to live.

Thank you for the friends who care for us.

May we seek opportunities to make our lives really count.

Thank you that you call us to live.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

God of life and love,
help us to go from here to live our lives to the full
and to offer ourselves in service of those in need.

Shower us with your love and gifts
that we might use them to be a blessing to others in our
community.

Amen.

Sunday 18th May 2025

A call to worship

The Lord's name is to be exalted,
his glory is above earth and heaven.
So, let us come before him now,
young and old together
and praise his name.

Reading: Acts 11:1-18
Peter's Report to the Church at Jerusalem

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying,

'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth."

But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved."

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?’ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.’

Reflection

Through this passage, God takes Peter and the Early Church, step by step, through a process of making all things new. Through a vision, which Peter then explains to others, and the Holy Spirit falling upon some Gentiles, God reveals the way for the Church to be. Through Jesus, the old ways have been made new, and salvation is opened up freely to anyone who wants to receive. This was a total cultural change and so there would understandably be many opponents to the idea. Imagine what your reaction would be if everyone in the UK was told to stop using any form of cutlery and that from now on you were only able to eat food with your hands. You’d likely be outraged and have a multitude of questions. I imagine that there were many in the Early Church who felt the same about uncircumcised Gentiles becoming followers of Jesus and their eating of what was previously considered unclean food.

It is perhaps understandable then that God in his compassion and wisdom takes the Jewish Christians on this journey to the new, step by step. In Peter’s vision, he sees everything three times and the message was unmistakable. Then there were six witnesses to the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles. This was double the number of witnesses normally needed to verify something as true. God was making all things new, liberating people from what were now unnecessary rules, and revealing more of who he is. How can we as a community distinguish between rules that have been put in place to protect us and rules that we need to be liberated from? What is God wanting to make new in our lives today?

Hymn STF 137

- 1 New every morning is the love
our wakening and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life, and power, and thought.

- 2 New mercies, each returning day
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

- 3 If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

- 4 Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and care.

- 5 The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask;
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

- 6 Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love
for perfect rest with you above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble (1792–1866)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 137.

A prayer of adoration

Lord God, you know every bone in our body,
every ache and pain, every beat of our heart, every emotion.
You know us inside out.
You know when we are joyful, but also when we struggle.
We take a moment now to pause and be aware of you.

We breathe out our old life
and breathe in the gloriousness of your new life.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We pray for countries and communities where crops have been decimated and livestock have perished.

May the old order of famine pass away
and a new order of abundance flourish:

in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

'What next?' is such a big question for young people too.

We pray for those around the world thinking about careers, about next steps; for all – especially girls and young women in Afghanistan and elsewhere – who are denied an education; for those who struggle to see a future for themselves at all.

May the old orders of pressure and prejudice pass away
and a new order of confidence and opportunity flourish:

in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

'What next?' is such a big question for those who feel at the end of their strength.

We pray for those caring for children with complex needs; for those caring for family with dementia or chronic illness; for those suffering from depression; for those worn out by grief.

May the old order of struggle pass away
and the new order of support flourish:

in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Life-giving God, Alpha and Omega, beginning and end,
journey with us as we go from this place into our communities.
As we look forward to the time when you will make all things
new,
enable us, by your Spirit, to bring your kingdom here on earth.
Amen.

Sunday 25th May 2025

Call to Worship

Come, all people from all places,
Let us be glad and sing for joy!
Let us praise the God who blesses and guides us.

Bible reading:

Acts 16:9-15

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

The Conversion of Lydia

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.

Reflection

What would we do if we were unexpectedly interrupted by God? If God met us in a dream and asked us to go somewhere, or to speak to someone, or to give someone something, would we do it? Would we trust in God's voice and provision? Would we immediately stop what we were doing and do what God had

asked? Would it make a difference if we knew the task wasn't going to be easy, that it wasn't all going to be plain sailing?

This is exactly what happens to Paul in our passage today. Paul was called by God through a vision to visit Macedonia. In the vision he saw a man pleading with him to come and help them. Paul's immediate reaction was to trust God, to know that God was calling him to proclaim the good news to them, and therefore that he needed to follow the call. However, Paul would have known that the journey wouldn't have been easy. But that didn't put Paul off. Perhaps he knew from experience that a life following Jesus was an adventure. It meant getting comfortable with the unexpected and being willing to go wherever and whenever God called.

Having reached Philippi, the leading city in the region of Macedonia, Paul spent several days there. Perhaps he was searching the city for the man he'd seen in his vision. On the Sabbath day, Paul went outside the city and down to the river, expecting to find a place of prayer. Instead, he finds a group of women led by Lydia, an unbaptized Gentile believer. As a dealer in purple cloth, she would have been wealthy and the head of her household – she was not attached to a man. As an empowered woman she would have been very unusual, counter-cultural even. Here God opens her heart, in a reversal of Pharaoh's story in Exodus where the Lord closed his heart.

This group of women, meeting outside the city to worship and explore faith together is not what Paul was expecting. Even though this was the early days of the Church, perhaps this group of women could be considered a fresh expression! For Paul it would have been a bit like Dorothy going on a journey along the yellow brick road to find the all-powerful wizard of Oz only to find what they had been searching for was something quite different. Not only that, but Paul went on the journey expecting to offer, but he ended up receiving. What expectations do we have of how God works that perhaps need changing? Are we holding on to wanting a life that is plain sailing, or are we willing to follow God through

the unexpected and turbulent? Where is God calling you today?
Will you follow?

Hymn: StF 645

- 1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

- 2 Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?
- 3 Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil:
- 4 Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore?

Priscilla Jane Owens (1829–1907)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 645.

A prayer of adoration

Lord of the sabbath,
you are there for us whatever day of the week it is,
but you don't barge into our lives without permission.
Even though you always know what is best for us,
you wait patiently for us to come to you.
You want us to be still and listen.
And, when we do, wow, you amaze us with your loving kindness.
You call us to journey on through difficulties,
with us every step of the way.
We love you and worship you, O Lord. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

A prayer of confession

Jesus asked, 'Do you want to get well?'
and the man trusted him to heal.
Sometimes, Lord, we are frightened of putting our whole trust in
you.
We get stuck in our old ways, nervous of what you might call us to
do.
Forgive us, Lord, when we fall so far short of your best for us.
Be our guide in all the storms of life, and lead us forward.
Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

The best time for healing is when the water in the pool is stirred.
You, God, stir our lives, as the waters at Bethesda were stirred.
You find us and forgive us in the turbulence.
The waters of your true and lasting forgiveness wash us and make
us new.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

All-knowing God, go before us this week
and give us grace to see your handiwork.

Travel with us as we go through the ups and downs
that will come our way.

Lead us to be more like Jesus, loving those we meet with an
extravagant and unexpected love.

Amen.