

16th May 2021 – Morning Service
The Patron Saint of the Doggedly Unspectacular
Rev Andrew Roberts

Welcome

You who are passing through hard times: welcome!

You who need strength to support those who are suffering: welcome!

You who are full of happiness: welcome!

You who are burdened and busy: welcome!

Welcome as we unite in worship of the one who offers us welcome, forgiveness, comfort and joy.

Gathering Prayer

Gracious God, set apart as your people yet together in your world,

we worship you as one.

Emboldened by your power, protected by your promises and filled with your peace,

we worship you as one.

Upheld by your word, inspired by your truth and named as your friends,

we worship you as one.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

StF 2 – Come, lets us sing to the One

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| 1) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Father of life,
Whose light fills the earth like the sun;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Great is the world he has made,
Are the myst'ries untold,
Is his measureless power of old;
Come, come let us sing to our God. | 2) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Saviour of life,
Find the fullness of God in the Son;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Wild is the mercy of Christ,
Is the richness of grace,
Is the unending life we embrace;
Come, come let us sing to our God. |
| Ch) <i>To our God, who is able
To strengthen us in his grace
Beyond all we imagine,
Be all glory and praise,
Be all praise.</i> | 3) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Spirit of life,
Leading us in the way of the Son;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Strong is the Spirit within,
Is the boldness to speak,
Is the power to run when we're weak;
Come, come let us sing to our God. |

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A prayer for forgiveness

Forgive us, gracious God, when we have turned away from your word.

Forgive us, when we have compromised your truth to fit in.

Forgive us, when we have bickered among ourselves and not shown the world that we are one.

Forgive us, when we have distanced ourselves from those you have called us to serve.

Forgive us, O God and restore us in down to earth holiness we pray. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

StF 83 – Praise my soul the King of Heaven

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| 1) Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King! | 3) Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In his hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows. |
| 2) Praise him for his grace and favour
To his people in distress;
Praise him, still the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness. | 4) Angels in the height, adore him;
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace! |

Henry Francis Lyte

CCL No. 515642

Reading: John 17:6-19

‘I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

‘I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Reading: Acts 1:12-26

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 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. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.’ (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

‘For,’ said Peter, ‘it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,” and,

“‘May another take his place of leadership.”

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

Address

Back in 2005 I had the privilege of being invited for an interview at Lambeth Palace. As I sat in the Archbishop’s lounge, looking at Rowan Williams’ family photos, I couldn’t quite believe where I was. I felt a bit like Del Boy in that fabulous Only Fools episode in the stately home – but don’t worry I didn’t offer to clean the chandeliers. I was deeply honoured to be offered a job in the nascent Fresh Expressions team that Rowan had formed in partnership with the Methodist Church. As part of that team there were many more trips to Lambeth and the huge blessing of getting to know Rowan and to be able to learn from his considerable wisdom.

One of the best things about the erstwhile Archbishop of Canterbury is his ability to conjure up a memorable phrase. In his latest book, *Candles in the Dark; Faith, hope and love in a time of pandemic* he continues that tradition. In our reading from Acts we heard the story of the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas, the one who was lost, to quote the words of Jesus in John 17:12 and about whom Peter had a bit to say in Acts 1. It is the only time we hear anything about Matthias. We know nothing about him before that episode and nothing about him afterwards. That has not stopped him having his own saints’ day, but did anyone notice that this week? St Matthias day is May 14th. Writing about him in *Candles in the Dark*, Rowan memorably describes him as ‘the patron saint of the doggedly unspectacular turners-up and hangers-on’.¹

Pondering as to why Luke bothers to tell us about Matthias, Rowan suggests ‘Perhaps Luke is saying the fullness of the apostolic witness includes those whose only contribution is that they lived faithfully in the company of Jesus’² drawing on the words of Peter in Acts 1:21 where he says that Judas’s replacement should be one who accompanied Jesus and the twelve from the time of Jesus’ baptism right through to his Ascension. One who could be, with the remaining eleven, a witness to the resurrection. Rowan goes on to say that sometimes ‘we need to be reminded that 90 percent of life is just turning up, as the saying goes. And that too can be apostolic and holy’.³

So, today let’s honour, celebrate and give thanks for the doggedly unspectacular turners-up and hangers-on. The quiet reliable ones in the office who know where everything is filed. The parents who put up and take down the goal nets in the pouring rain so that the kids’ football can be played. Those who without fuss or bother walk round the park on a Monday morning with their high viz jackets and bin bags clearing up all the litter from the weekend. And those in the body of believers, the Church, who have always been there; faithfully praying, giving, serving and quietly witnessing to the risen Lord without fuss or bother. If you would count yourself amongst this number then please be encouraged today – your faithfulness is appreciated.

It is easy to take the Matthias’ of this world for granted. Again, Rowan says this, ‘Sometimes when we talk about mission and the need for growth, we give the message that those who actually bother to be there in the first place aren’t quite interesting enough and we’d like different people (younger, livelier, cleverer....). Nothing wrong with growth, for goodness’ sake; but we should also recognize a faith and even a holiness in those who simply stay in company, share the burdens unobtrusively and do their apostolic bit just by that steady solidarity.’⁴

Over the past year it's been a bit tricky at times to know what 'being there' means. For many it has not been safe to be in physical space together and for others it has not been possible to 'be there' in online space. Some of the Matthias' amongst us may have felt a real sense of loss as they have not been able to show up as they have faithfully done for so many years. I think for example of the retired lady who for years has turned up in Shona's classroom to help the children with their reading and the couple who would always smile so warmly when I was preaching – even when they and I both knew that my sermon that morning was a bit of a fresh air pie which looked great but was somewhat lacking in content.

Happily, at the same time, new Matthias's have emerged, in the form of those who have faithfully shown up online, known which button to press and who have patiently reminded us when we are, or are not, on mute. So, as we begin to emerge into a safer world, let us honour and be thankful for the unspectacular turners-up, encourage them in all they are and do, think carefully as to how those who have not been able to turn up as they once did might be able to again, and pray that God would bless them as Jesus blessed his first disciples. Amen.

StF 241 – When we were in the darkest night

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| <p>1) When we were in the darkest night,
And wondered if our eyes would ever
see the light,
You were there, Lord.
When we were in the stormy gale,
And wondered if we'd ever live in peace again,
You were there, Lord.
You were there in the struggle,
You were there in the fight,
You were there all the time.</p> | <p>2) So, whatever lies ahead,
Whatever roads our grateful hearts
will come to tread,
You'll be there, Lord.
We will fix our eyes on you,
And know that there is grace enough
to see us through.
You'll be there, Lord.
You'll be there in the struggle.
You'll be there in the fight.
You'll be there all the time.</p> |
| <p>Ch) <i>We praise you, the God of our yesterdays.
We praise you, the God who is here today.
We praise you, our God, as tomorrow comes.</i></p> | <p>Br) You're always closer than we know,
Always more involved and in control.
We will trust our lives to you -
The One who was and is and is to come.</p> |
| <p>End) We thank you - for grace in our yesterdays.
We thank you - for peace in our hearts today.
We thank you - our joy as tomorrow comes.
We will trust you God.</p> | |

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Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Loving God, who understands our needs before we think and speak, we bring our prayers before you: giving thanks for and praying your blessing upon the Matthias' of this world, at work, within the Church and in the community who quietly and faithfully keep on keeping on. And then we pray:

for the hurting and the hurt;
for the loved and the loveless;
for the young and old;
for believers and non-believers;
for those certain of their faith and those who waver;
for those of different faiths and identities from us;
for the ill and those in pain and distress;
for the dying and for the grieving whose minds are bewildered and burdened by grief.

At the end of Christian Aid week, we pray for your blessing upon the work of the charity and especially this year upon Rose and Florence and the people with whom Christian Aid are working in Kenya. And we continue to pray for urgent action to tackle the climate changes that do so much damage in Kenya and in many other places too. Loving God bless and keep all those we pray for and, all those we should pray for this day. We offer and live our prayers in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 343 – All my days

1) All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness You heard my cry,
And waves of mercy poured down on my life.

*Ch) Beautiful Saviour, wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the way, the truth, the life.
Star of the morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's champion,
And You reign, You reign over all!*

2) I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails,
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end.

3) I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades,
Where countless worshippers will share one song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

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Sending prayer & Blessing

As we leave this place, Lord, may our prayers be just beginning. May our worship, our time here, what we have learned and what we have discovered, lead us into action and lives full of worship every hour of every day. We ask in the name of Jesus, whose whole life was an offering of worship to you. **Amen.**
And so may the blessing of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and go with us wherever we turn up and hang on. **Amen.**

All references from: Rowan Williams, *Candles in the Dark* London: SPCK, 2020

¹ p24 ² p24 ³ p24 ⁴ p25

Prayers adapted from ROOTS for Worship