

25th May 2025 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship

Alleluia! The Lord reigns! Let the earth rejoice! Alleluia!

StF 137 – New every morning is the love

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| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

O God, you are Lord of heaven and earth; you made the world and everything in it.
Let the peoples praise you, O God. **Let all the peoples praise you.**
You give to all mortals life and breath; in you we live and move and have our being.
Let all the peoples praise you, O God. **Let all the peoples praise you.**
May all the earth rejoice in you, breaking forth into joyous songs of praise.
Let all the peoples praise you, O God. **Let all the peoples praise you.**
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

"Do not store up treasures on earth."

We confess our love of possessions

"Do not worry about your life."

We confess our lack of trust.

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged."

We confess our readiness to condemn.

"Be merciful, as your Father is merciful."

We confess our reluctance to forgive.

"Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you."

We confess our longing for revenge.

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

We confess our slowness to do good.

Merciful God. forgive us these and all our sins; teach us again the way of Christ and help us to bear witness to him in deed as in word. We ask it for his sake. **Amen.**

StF 125 – Praise and thanksgiving

- 1) Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer,
For all things living you have made good;
Harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard,
Hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.
- 2) Lord, bless the labour we bring to serve you,
That with our neighbour we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling, we would work with you;
Harvesting, milling, for daily bread.
- 3) Father, providing food for your children,
Your wisdom guiding teaches us share
One with another, so that, rejoicing
Sister and brother may know your care
- 4) Then will your blessing reach every people;
Each one confessing your gracious hand.
When you are reigning no one will hunger:
Your love sustaining fruitful the land.

Albert Frederick Bayly © 1986 Oxford University Press

Reading: Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"

StF 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

- 1) May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do or say.
- 2) May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through his power.
- 3) May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.
- 4) May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing -
This is victory.
- 5) May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson

Prayer of Thanksgiving

It is right and good, most gracious God, it is our duty and our joy to give you thanks and praise. In tender care you made the world and you nourish it with love. To bring us sinners back to you, you sent your only Son to share our life and die our death, and be raised again in glory. He has gone into heaven and reigns at your right hand, with angels, authorities and powers made subject to him, and he will judge the world in truth and righteousness. In the name of Christ you have sent your Spirit, the Advocate, to be with us for ever, teaching us all things, reminding us of all that Christ has said to us. By the leading of the Spirit, you guide us to that eternal city, which has no need of sun and moon, for your glory is its light, and where, with all your people, we shall dwell with you for ever. For all your love, for all your gifts, most gracious God, we give you thanks; we bless your holy name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reading: Acts 16: 9-15

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Reading: John 14: 23-29

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

Sermon

The spirit is very much in our readings today. The spirit does amazing things. Ezekiel's transformation of the valley of dry bones is an image of the life-giving spirit. In Acts, the spirit calls Paul to Macedonia, and Lydia to baptism and prayer. And in the Gospel passage, the spirit is given to teach for our learning. But I am rushing ahead! Let me first explain one thing.

The Hebrew word for spirit is "Ruah". It is a feminine word. So when I talk about the spirit today, I will use "she", certainly not "it", for she is one person of the Trinity. God isn't "it", nor is God merely "male". Now I know that it can be argued that Jesus always talks of God as "father", but that has more to do with the culture of his day than anything else. It was a male-dominated society. But calling the spirit "she" reflects how the Hebrew Bible speaks of the Spirit of God. She is feminine; the spirit is part of the nature of God, one of the Trinity. It shouldn't surprise us, then, to hear the feminine being used. After all, the Bible is clear: God created us human beings, male and female, in his own image.

The fullness of God is neither male nor female, but simply male and female, part of the wonder, the otherness, the mystery of the Holy God. The spirit along with the massive number of female images for God throughout the Old and New Testaments reminds us how we can limit our perception of God if, contrary to the Bible, we choose only to talk about God using male images. In our readings, the spirit is at work, transforming a hopeless people, calling Paul to Macedonia, and moving Lydia to be baptised. And in John's Gospel, she is Jesus' gift of continual presence. I say this so that none of us are distracted by the use of "she" or "her", and so that no one dismisses this as a sermon on feminism! It's not! This is a sermon on the spirit and her life today.

Now, back to the beginning! I started by saying the spirit does amazing things! How did hearing those words make you feel? Some may have felt an "Uh?" coming on. Some may have felt a "yeah" welling up. Some may have felt uncomfortable. And some may have already switched off – but I hope not!

In Ezekiel, the spirit is life-giving. Those dry bones are the prophet's way of looking at his own society, defeated, in exile. They'd lost more than just a home; exile was more than defeat and occupation. Exile brought the Hebrew people to the lowest of places. They wept by the rivers of Babylon, unable to sing to the Lord in a foreign land. Why? Well the promise of God to Abraham was that he would father a great people. But in exile, that didn't ring true. The promise of God through Moses and Joshua was a rich and fertile land as a proof of God's blessing. This land had been taken by the Babylonians. And the final straw: the Temple in Jerusalem and the Holy of Holies at its centre, had been totally destroyed. The Holy of Holies has been the focal point of their sense of God's eternal presence. So they had lost all hope. They needed to be made aware that the commitment of God to them was not confined to the Promised Land. God's breath, his "Ruah" would enliven them again. The spirit inspired, breathed life into them. God wills life for all, life in all its abundance. For Ezekiel, God could no more leave the people weeping by the waters of Babylon than he could have ignored their cries in the work camps of the Pharaohs all those centuries earlier.

In Acts, we have a different aspect to the spirit. Here we see the spirit calling people, enlisting people to do God's work – just as you and I are enlisted, drawn to worship and service. In the reading Paul is called to Macedonia; Lydia is called to baptism and hospitality. Notice, I use the word "call". It is an invitation – the constant invitation to be an instrument of God's grace and will. It is the spirit that swells our hearts when we are at our best. She is the one who urges us when we are at our worst. She is the spirit who brooded over pre-creation chaos, and invites soothing, purposeful order. So in the Acts reading the spirit invites participation in the work of God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus promises the spirit will come to teach. Learning is a journey of discovery. Willingly or unwillingly, consciously or not, we are learning all the time. You are never too old to learn! Learning is not essentially about facts. It is about how we perceive and how we respond to our experiences. We learn about the heart of God as we experience and deepen our friendship with him, and explore the life and ministry of Jesus. To forget that the spirit teaches is, at the very least, risky, if not sacrilegious. To assume that there is no more to discover or rejoice in about God betrays a distinct lack of respect for the holiness, grandness, the otherness of God. The spirit is not possessed at confirmation and then controlled. The true heart knows that the spirit will initiate us into the mysteries of faith. This initiation isn't a one-off action. The spirit is constantly initiating us in our pilgrimage. As we change, as the communities around us change, the spirit is constantly leading us in new ways of understanding God. As we experience illness and loss, love or deep friendship, the spirit moves, and each experience opens us to new glimpses of God's heart. We've highlighted just three characteristics of the spirit. She breathes life into creation; that is, she inspires those who weep to sing again. She is God's breath in our life, She invites us to a journey of witness. She constantly initiates us to be the followers of Jesus, just as the disciples learnt to follow Jesus way beyond his earthly ministry. She doesn't leave us in stultifying routine, for "new every morning is the love our waking and uprising prove."

The spirit inspires, invites and initiates not only in the pages of the Bible. She continually does so in the pages of our life. We are the disciples of today. At times our pilgrimage travels through the valleys of dry bones, and God will breathe new life into us. Sometimes we are reluctant to hear her invitation; always we are in need of invitation – learning more of the wonder of God. At every stage in life, God can enter. His spirit may enter through our neighbour, through our prayers, even, perhaps, through a novel or TV programme.

Here is a message of encouragement to each of us! Be open to the inspiring, inviting, initiating spirit. She is the life and adventure of “God with us”.

StF 395 – Spirit of the living God

Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me,
Mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.

Daniel Iverson

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we put our trust in you, and in you is our rest. We pray for all pilgrim peoples as the journey through this world, for all seekers, for those who search for truth and integrity. May we and your whole church live as those travelling into your love and deeper into your presence. We pray today for places of pilgrimage, and places of special holiness, for all who act as guides to others on their pilgrimage.

God, as you call us to you, **Guide us in our journey.**

We remember before you all who are homeless, all who have been made refugees by war and oppression. We pray for those who live rough and who sleep out in our towns and cities. We pray for travelling peoples and gypsies.

God, as you call us to you, **Guide us in our journey.**

We give thanks for our homes and places of security, where we find love, rest and refreshment. May your spirit be at home in our homes, may your ways be known to us and may we walk in them. We pray for guidance in our journey through life, for ourselves, our families and our loved ones.

God, as you call us to you, **Guide us in our journey.**

Lord of peace, give rest to the weary, the worn and the fearful; give peace to the anxious, the troubles and the distressed. We pray for all who have lost courage or hope in their journey, all whose way seems dark and threatening. We pray for all those troubled in body mind or spirit, for all who are ill.

God, as you call us to you, **Guide us in our journey.**

We give thanks for all who have come to their journey's end on earth: may they find rest and peace and life in you. We pray for the day when we will be one with them in your eternal kingdom.

God, as you call us to you, **Guide us in our journey. 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 297 – Christ is alive!

- 1) Christ is alive! Let Christians sing;
His cross stands empty to the sky:
Let streets and homes with praises ring;
Love drowned in death, shall never die.
- 2) Christ is alive! No longer bound
To distant years in Palestine,
But saving, healing, here and now,
And touching every place and time.
- 3) In every insult, rift and war,
Where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
And lives, where even hope has died.
- 4) Women and men, in age and youth,
Can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
And find the way, the life, the truth,
Revealed in Jesus, freed for all.
- 5) Christ is alive and comes to bring
Good news to this and every age,
Till earth and sky and ocean ring
With joy, with justice, love, and praise.

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Blessing

The goodness of the Father go with you. The love of the saviour lead you. The grace of the Spirit guide you. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**