**Thatcham URC – Worshipping Together (Gathered and Separate)**

**A Short Reflective Service**

**Sunday – 24 April 2022, 10.30am.**

**Order of Service**

**Welcome and Introduction**

It is a week since we celebrated the resurrection of Christ and since the day He appeared to the woman, the two on the road to Emmaus, and then Ten Apostles in Jerusalem, but one of them was missing. We shall think about that missing one today as part of our worship.

**Call to Worship:**

**Ephesians 1:1-3**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In some manuscripts the word ‘Ephesus’ is missing; there is just a blank. Some people think Ephesians was a special, general, circular letter, sent to all the churches. Maybe we can put ‘Thatcham’ in there! But why have I high-lighted ‘Praise’, ‘blessed’ and ‘blessing’?

**Prayer of Praise and Confession**

Paul has written that we should praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have cometogether to worship You, to praise You, and to thank You for all Your gifts for, as James wrote “Every good and perfect **gift** is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.” But most of all we thank You for the gift of Your Son and our Saviour, who gave His life to redeem us from our sins.

**Please join me in the following confession.**

Our God our Father, we know that we have been created in your image,

But we know that image has become tarnished because of our sin.

We thank you that Christ died for our sins

And in your mercy, and through our faith in Him, you have forgiven us.

Strengthen us through your Holy Spirit to love our fellow-Christians as You love them,

And to love our neighbours as ourselves,

And help us to live a life of love

so that all we say and do may be to the glory of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. 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**

**Hymn: Immortal, Invisible, God only wise. MP 327**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,

  In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,

  almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,

  nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;

thy justice like mountains high soaring above

  thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;

  in all life thou livest, the true life of all;

we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,

  and wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,

  thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight,

all laud we would render, O help us to see

  ’tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

**Dedication of Offerings**

All good gifts around us are sent from heav'n above and we ask You to bless the gifts that we return to You, for the work of this church in this area of your kingdom. Amen.

**Bible Reading: John 20:19-29**

**19**On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ **20**After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

**21**Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ **22**And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. **23**If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’

**24**Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25**So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.’

**26**A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ **27**Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’

**28**Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’

**29**Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’

**Reflection:**

**Note 1:** The Holy Spirit was given to the Apostles before the day of Pentecost.

**Question 1:** If it is only God who can forgive sins, what did Jesus mean when He said “If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven”?

**Question 2:** Why wouldn’t Thomas accept the testimony of the other ten apostles, plus that of other people, that Christ had risen?

**Question 3:** Did Thomas actually put his fingers into the holes made by the nails and put his hand into the wound caused by the spear?

**Question 4:** What does ‘blessed’ mean?

Two answers:

Answer 1 is found in “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” and “it is more blessed to give than receive.”

Answer 2 is found in “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”*

Answer 1 means to be happy, to be content.

Answer 2 means to speak well of, to praise.

**Note 2:** Christ said “Blessed (happy, content) are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” That is us. This is a blessing from Christ upon us.

**Hymn: How deep the Father’s love for us MP 988**

How deep the Father’s love for us,  
How vast beyond all measure,  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss –  
The Father turns His face away,  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,  
My sin upon His shoulders;  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers.  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished;  
His dying breath has brought me life –  
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,  
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;  
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,  
His death and resurrection.  
Why should I gain from His reward?  
I cannot give an answer;  
But this I know with all my heart –  
His wounds have paid my ransom.

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**Prayers of Intercession: Duty Elder**

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are alive! We praise you for the glory of your resurrection which means that we will never be separated from you. We pause for a moment to remember times when we have known your presence in our lives this week.

Help us to look for signs of you in everything we do, wherever we go and whoever we meet this week. Keep us focussed on you, our risen triumphant Lord. Help us to kneel with Thomas and say, ‘My Lord and my God’.

Lord Jesus, even when we don’t have your physical presence with us:

help us to know what’s real.

Lord Jesus, Thomas needed to see the wounds in your hands and side to know that you really had risen. We thank you that those scars demonstrate to us that you are a wounded God who therefore understands all our sorrows and suffering. We know that you have gone before us into the darkest places. We lift to you now all the places in our world that are suffering right now. We pray for Ukraine, still in the grip of war; we pray for Afghanistan and Yemen whose conflict and pain has gone from our news screens; we remember the victims of flooding in South Africa. In the silence we bring to you any other places of pain in our world.

Lord Jesus, your wounds remind us that you are there and that you care:

help us to care for them too.

Lord, we know that when you stretched your arms out on the cross it was to show love for the whole world. Everyone matters to you. Everyone is within the realm of your love. Everyone is loved equally by you. We particularly pray for refugees and all those fleeing persecution. We ask that our government will show compassion to all those who are seeking safety and stability in our country. We pray for people that the world seems to have forgotten: the lost and alone; the housebound; those in hospital for many weeks. We pray for children living on the streets; those in the care system; those who feel unloved.

Lord Jesus, your outstretched arms tell us that you love the whole world:

help us to love everyone too.

Lord, you came into that upper room, into a place full of fearful people and brought the beauty of your peace. We pray for all those we know who need your peace at the moment: those who are sick; those who are anxious and troubled; those who are sad or grieving; those who are dying; those who are facing exams soon; those who are afraid.

Lord Jesus, breathe your peace deep into their hearts:

and fill them with the knowledge of your presence.

Lord, you didn’t want your disciples to keep the good news of your rising to themselves. You said to them: ‘As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.’ Help us not to be afraid to tell our family and friends about you. Show us who to talk to and how to show your love to those around us: at work, at school, in our streets and in our homes. We pray for all those we know who are struggling to believe that you are real and that you really rose again from the dead. Help us to share with them what we know about you and help us to show them your reality by living and loving like you did.

Lord Jesus, you give us your peace and love:

send us out to take your love and peace to others around us.

Lord Jesus, as we start a new week, take us out of our upper rooms and into the world to live and breathe your presence. Go before us into every situation we face and help us to know that you are really there.

Thank you, Lord, for rising again for us:

and filling our hearts with joy. Amen.

**Hymn:** **I know not why God’s wondrous grace MP 279**

1

I know not why God’s wondrous grace

  To me He hath made known,

Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love

  Redeemed me for His own.

*But “I know Whom I have believed*

*And am persuaded that He is able*

*To keep that which I’ve committed*

*Unto Him against that day.”*

2

I know not how this saving faith

  To me He did impart,

Nor how believing in His word

  Wrought peace within my heart.

3

I know not how the Spirit moves,

  Convincing men of sin,

Revealing Jesus through the Word,

  Creating faith in Him.

4

I know not what of good or ill

  May be reserved for me,

Of weary ways or golden days,

  Before His face I see.

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**A Prayer and Blessing**

Let us share the blessing. I will say the parts in regular type if you could respone with the parts in italics.

**The blessing:**

May the Lord bless us … **And may the Lord keep us;**

May the Lord make His face to shine upon us … **And may the Lord be gracious unto us.**

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon us … **And may the Lord give us His peace.**

Let us depart in peace, to serve the Lord and one another in love.

**In the name of Christ, Amen. May God bless us all.**

Let us offer one another the sign of peace.