

## Morning Service of the Word

### Welcome and Opening Prayer

#### SONG

#### Introduction

O Lord, open our lips:

**and our mouth shall sing your praise.**

O God, make speed to save us

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;

**as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

Praise the Lord:

**The Lord's name be praised.**

#### Confession

A moment of silence:

Christ our Passover Lamb has been offered for us. So, let us rejoice by putting away all malice and evil and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

**God our Father, we are sorry for the times when we have used your gifts carelessly and acted ungratefully.**

**We are sorry when we enjoy the fruits of the harvest but forget that you have given them to us.**

**We are sorry that, while we belong to a people who are full and satisfied, we ignore the cry of the hungry.**

**We are sorry that we are thoughtless and do not care enough for the world you have made.**

**We are sorry that we store up goods for ourselves alone as if there were no God in heaven.**

**Father, in your mercy, forgive us and help us. Amen.**

#### Absolution

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins and restore us in his service to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

#### SONG

## **Bible Reading**

### **Acts 4:32-35 - New International Version**

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **SONG**

### **Gospel Reading**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to..... **Glory to you O Lord.**

### **John 20:19-31**

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!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

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

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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."

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!" 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." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## Sermon

### Easter 2 (2021)

#### Sharing (Acts 4: 32-35)

I'm guessing anyone who's ever been a parent, or involved with children in some way or other, may well have used the phrase 'share nicely': and it soon becomes evident that from an early age some children find it harder to share than others. For most, it's definitely a skill that needs to be taught and nurtured.

But it's not only children who struggle with the concept of sharing – it can be a struggle for adults as well.....and I think even more so in the age we live in now. I could be wrong, but it seems to me that we live in a very 'me orientated' society. The stance many people take is: 'What's in it for me?' 'How many more possessions can I accumulate?' 'It's mine!'

And, even in poorer societies this can be seen. Will a parent who is hooked on smoking, or drugs, or alcohol always make sure their children's needs for good food and clothing come first? Or is it their wants that take priority a lot of the time?

Even way back in the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah talks about people only seeing their own selfish interests.

Now please hear me: I'm not saying everyone is as extreme as this. However, I do think that, if we allowed God to shine a light on how good our sharing skills are, we might be surprised with what he shows us; and not always pleasantly. And, for me, that's at the centre of our reading for today: God has shone a light into the lives of these people in the Acts reading. I wonder what they were like before they became believers. Were they so generous with their possessions before Jesus came into their lives? If they had come together before the anointing of the Holy Spirit, would they have been a group of people who were one in heart and mind as the scripture tells us? If we look around at those of us who come here to St James, we're a very mixed bunch aren't we?

And I don't just mean our personalities. We've all come from lives where different sets of standards will have been imposed upon us. We almost certainly would have had different ways of viewing life. But, as with the believers in our reading, despite all our different upbringings, our faith in Jesus is now the glue that holds us together.

Yes, I know we'll all be at different stages in our walk with him: some of us will be more mature in the faith than others: but each of us allowing Jesus to be in control brings us closer to being one in heart and mind. By the way, maturity isn't always about how long we've been following Jesus; because we could have given our lives to Jesus 40 years ago but not allowed his Holy Spirit to keep changing us into the likeness of God. Instead, we've hung onto old attitudes which are un-Christ-like because we refuse to change our thinking. We have chosen to keep our Christian growth stunted. So, for example, a person who has gone to church for many, many years but still hasn't given up old grudges will be far more immature than a person who has come to church for only a few years but has worked hard to shed the past and walk into the future Jesus has for them.

Right! The reading! When I very first heard this reading years ago, I thought, 'Flippin heck! I don't think I could do what they did?' But, as I've grown in the Christian faith, I have noticed some important factors which have added to my understanding. This early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought about by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believer's lives: and one of the key facts that Jesus will still want his followers to grasp is that everything we have comes from him – everything - and that's a hard concept to take on board. What do you mean everything I have belongs to God? It's me who's worked hard for it! Or, I'm entitled to the benefits from the state! It's all mine!

Whether we care to admit to it or not, we can be very precious about our money and possessions: and it often takes a long time for the Holy Spirit to convict us that all we have comes to us because of God's generosity – not because of anything we deserve.

This lack of realisation and belief that everything we have is God's is the main reason why so many Christians don't tithe their income to God. Tithing means giving a tenth of our income to God as soon as we get it; either by putting it in the offering here at church or supporting a charity regularly. So, if our weekly income is £50, we would give £5 a week to God. If our weekly income is £1000, we would give £100 a week to God.

Giving God one tenth isn't a biblical command but nonetheless it's a vital principle to follow. If everyone surrendered to God and followed this principle, churches wouldn't be struggling so much for money to pay the bills, keep the buildings open, and give away to the needy. Added to which God is so generous that he leaves us with nine tenths to live on – definitely 'the lion's share'. But, as in all things, God gives us free will as to how we distribute our income. This Acts church had obviously taken on board that all they had had come from God; and the resulting impact was huge as they shared everything with others. Some things to note:

The sharing was voluntary. No one was forced to do it. It was a work of grace by the Holy Spirit. Nor did it involve all private property, but only as much as was needed.

So, it's a bit like I know that some of you still put your regular weekly amount on the plate but are also putting in a bit extra to provide funds for replacing the sanctuary carpet which is becoming decidedly shabby! And, importantly, it was not a membership requirement to be part of the church. No one here at St James will be saying that you need to give 'x' amount to be able to come – but we do hope that you'll be open to God and put in what he prompts you to. In 'normal times' we bring up the offering and say, 'All things come from you and of your own do we give you'. For all of us the question is, 'How much do we actually believe that?'

My prayer is that St James will flourish numerically, spiritually, and financially – not just so that we can share amongst each other but so that we can share God's bounty with those in the community around us.

## **The Creed**

**We believe in God the Father, by whose plan earth and heaven sprang into being and all created things began.**

**We believe in Christ the Saviour, Son of God in human frame, virgin-born, the child of Mary, upon whom the Spirit came.**

**Christ, who on the cross forsaken, like a lamb to slaughter led; suffered under Pontius Pilate, and descended to the dead.**

**We believe in Jesus risen, heaven's King to rule and reign, to the Father's side ascended till as judge he comes again.**

**We believe in God the Spirit; in one church, below and above: saints of God in one communion, one in holiness and love.**

**So, by faith, our sins forgiven, Christ our Saviour, Lord and Friend, we shall rise with him in glory to a life that knows no end.**

## **Peace**

### **Intercessions**

#### **Easter 2 (2021)**

Father God, we ask that you will give all of us in your worldwide Church courage: courage to face disappointment without bitterness; courage to shoulder responsibility with cheerfulness; courage to hold fast to the good in the face of evil; courage to make experiments without being afraid of making mistakes; courage to get up when we fall, and go forward again; courage to trust that we can share our finances as you ask us to, knowing that we will still have enough; courage to bear good witness to Jesus Christ for the glory and honour of his name.

Father God, we pray for those countries at war and for those between whom there is distrust and suspicion. We pray that peace may never be dismissed as impossible but acknowledged as the only real victory. We pray too for the areas of degradation and moral decay in our world, that there may be a turning away from self-indulgence to self-discipline; from deception to integrity; from lawlessness to ordered peace. We pray your blessing on all who administer justice, those working in law courts, all who are serving on juries, and those who make laws that they may be given insight and truthfulness.

Father God, through Jesus you announce peace to our community. Breathe upon our common life your generosity, and in your grace open our hearts to share of our riches and poverty. We continue to pray for relationships between children and parents, particularly during this holiday time. Instil into parents the realisation that they need to be examples of good behaviour and encouraging conversation towards their children. Take away the habit of shouting as a way of communication. Instil into children the need to be obedient and

develop in them their natural creative abilities for good instead of following a destructive path.

Father God, we pray for all those who are ill, injured, feeling battered by life, struggling to face each empty day. We name them silently now.....May all who are in special need experience your healing presence, your inner peace, and your hope for each new day.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**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.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

### **SONG**

### **Blessing and Dismissal**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**