

Prayers at Home for Sunday 17th May 2020 6th Sunday of Easter

Hymn

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the Word:
from heav'n he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

Elect from ev'ry nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union
with the God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.

Introduction

Today is the 6th Sunday of Easter. Five full weeks since Easter and we enter the 6th. The Season of Easter presses on as we approach Ascension Day this Thursday and soon will be Whitsun or Pentecost. How quickly time passes!

An essential part of Church life is to hold the different aspects of our life in our prayers. I'd like us to think today a little about those in our schools. It's my privilege to be a governor at Greatham Primary School and my word, what a cracking good school it is. Sadly, for me at least, one of the casualties of the lockdown was a couple of Easter Assemblies. The plan to give every child a palm cross at the first and an Easter egg at the second must wait till next year.

This week's Hymn - The Church's one Foundation



Samuel John Stone was born on 25 April 1839 at his father's rectory in the parish of Whitmore, Staffs. His father, William, was a Hebrew scholar, a botanist and a vicar - but he did only have one parish! After ordination he served a curacy in Windsor from 1862, before becoming vicar of St. Paul's, Haggerston in 1874 and later All Hallows London Wall. Stone died on 19 November 1900.

Stone wrote the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" in the 1860s as a response to a schism within the Church of South Africa where the Bishop of Natal had denounced much of the Bible as fictitious. This topic is alluded to within the third verse (below) of the text. It is the verse which is usually omitted from worship today in part, because divisions in the church now are different issues and for the simple practical reason it also makes for a very long hymn!

The missing verse

Though with a scornful wonder
men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping,
their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

As the hymn has developed other verses have also been added but then dropped!

I asked our headteacher, Jo Goman how she and the school are doing in this difficult time and about her hopes and fears for the coming weeks ... who said ...

Thank you for asking how I am. I'm really well and so is everybody at school. I'm so proud of my staff – we continue to do a great job for the children and have not yet had a day when we've not been open. We are hoping to have the Year R (year 1) children and Year 6 children back in school after half term. We know they won't all be able to come back at the same time but by coming back in small groups we hope we can keep them really safe – we can't wait to see them.

For our concerns we are all concerned for our own health, the children's health and also for the education that they'll be missing, and have missed, throughout this time. We do have incredible parents and families though and the children have been very well supported at home, both through staff planning and also through their parent's brilliant work.

I wish you all a lovely Sunday.

Acts 17:22-31

NRSV

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one ancestor^[a] he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God^[b] and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said,

'For we too are his offspring.'

²⁹ Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Psalm 66: 7 - 18

Bless our God, O you peoples; make the voice of his praise to be heard,

Who holds our souls in life and suffers not our feet to slip.

For you, O God, have proved us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

You brought us into the snare; you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.

You let enemies ride over our heads; we went through fire and water;
but you brought us out into a place of liberty.

**I will come into your house with burnt offerings
and will pay you my vows, which my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.**

I will offer you fat burnt sacrifices with the smoke of rams; I will sacrifice oxen and goats.

Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul.

I called out to him with my mouth and his praise was on my tongue.

**If I had nursed evil in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me,
But in truth God has heard me; he has heeded the voice of my prayer.**

Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer,
nor withheld his loving mercy from me.

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep^[a] my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,^[b] to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in^[c] you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Reflection

The phrase in the reading that hits me is this one. ‘If you love me, keep my commandments.’ It comes just before Jesus’s promise that God his Father would give his followers the Holy Spirit once he had gone. And physically of course Jesus in his human form did go as we remember on Thursday, this Thursday, Ascension Day.

There are manifestations of God’s love all over the place and of people keeping God’s commandments. We see it in hospitals and care homes - in the selfless love of those who doctor, nurse, clean, care and do all the things risking their own lives in ways that go far beyond the call of duty.

We see manifestations of God’s love all over the place, of people keeping God’s commandments – loving God, loving one another. In the people who have kept working and the world turning; and in schools all over the country, all over the world in fact as teachers have nurtured the children of essential workers and those with special needs or challenges. Today let’s thank God for schools and those who work in them and especially for the school in the benefice, at Greatham, for Jo, the staff and children there..

One of the big challenges for all schools will be social distancing. Children want to touch, to hold and to be close to each other but they will have to learn how not to, just as we as adults have learnt not to shake hands or get too close.

Jesus promised his Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit by which God binds us together as we and all God’s children learn new ways to live in the months to come.

Let us pray

Prayers

written by Robin and Mary Crittenden

Loving God, you sent your Son, Jesus to be part of a human family – nurtured and cared for, taught and loved. Your love never fails, even in the darkest moments, love gives us hope; Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far. As we pray in our individual homes – around our nation and around the world, we are united in one family.

We think today particularly for our families and children.

We pray for those at home, seeking to care for and teach children, sometimes in challenging circumstances, particularly those whose home is not safe or available.

We thank you for all those working in our schools, whether doing distance learning or caring for those currently attending school.

We pray for those in our school in Greatham as they plan for re-opening – for strength and health as they meet their new challenge.

We think of families divided from one another, missing family gathering, particularly grandparents and those who have lost their livelihoods.

We pray for those who are more lonely than they have ever been, those who are bereaved and grieving.

We thank you for all those, who each day leave the safety of their home and family to care for others. Give them strength, wisdom, endurance and safety.

We thank you for our church family, for all the love and support we have. As we reach out to one another, help us to love each other as you have loved us.

May your love that never fails, continue to be shared amongst us.

We pray that we will know that we are all kept in your love and care.

May your love that never ends be our comfort, strength and guide. Amen.

And as Jesus taught us:

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that 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.

Conclusion

As the unlocking of the lockdown begins there are a few questions on the Church News this week that I'd value your thoughts on because Church like school will be different in the future. We don't know just yet how different or for how long, but it won't be as it was so please have a look at those questions and let me know what you think.

Let's pray for God's blessing.

Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments.

May God's Spirit of Truth be close to us; God's love live within us and God's peace rest upon us.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless us now and always. **Amen.**